

Yu Kuwabara — Full Biography

Tokyo-based Japanese composer (b. 1984)

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Traditions are never hermetic, nor are they necessarily limited to one cultural area – instead, they can be updated, transferred, superimposed... and that is called innovation.

KonSequenzen: Yu Kuwabara, ACHT BRÜCKEN | Musik für Köln

Yu Kuwabara's output has been wide ranging, from soloists to contemporary music ensembles, orchestras, and much in between. But perhaps her most extraordinary piece is this hour-long work for a vocal consort of Buddhist monks.

Eight women composers to watch in 2023, Bachtrack

In ihren Kompositionen bringt die junge Japanerin uralte Traditionen ihres Landes und zeitgenössische Ideen, Thematiken und Arbeitsansätze in Einklang.

Die Komponistin Yu Kuwabara Neu und alt sind kein Widerspruch, Deutschlandfunk

Tokyo-based Japanese composer **Yu Kuwabara**. (b. 1984) creates music as an inquiry into her own being. She has been researching traditional Japanese music, arts, and thought to reach back to her origins and confirm her sense of existence. Rooted in the embodied nature of the Japanese language — its inner corporeality — she explores sound and words at their sources, creating works that connect the cultural past and present, and bridge East and West.

As a life's work, she has studied and drawn inspiration from Shomyo (Buddhist chant), Kagura, and various forms of Japanese folk performing arts, and has collaborated with numerous traditional artists — including Noh performers, the rakugo master Kokonte Shinsuke, the Buddhist chant ensemble Shomyo no Kai — Voices of a Thousand Years, and performers of diverse Japanese instruments. Guided by the conviction that to stand on one's own culture and voice is the very path to resonate with the world, she continues to open spaces where sound can become.

She was commissioned by important festivals, concerts, and ensembles such as Lucerne Festival, ACHT BRÜCKEN | Musik für Köln, [I&I Foundation](#), [International Ensemble Modern Academy](#) in the context of [CRESC...](#) Biennale für Aktuelle Musik Frankfurt Rhein-Main, ZeitRäume Basel - Biennale für neue Musik und Architektur, [Transit Festival 20-21](#), National Theatre of Japan, Suntory Foundation of Arts, NHK-FM, Shizuoka AOI Concert Hall, Yokohama Minato-Mirai Hall, Kanagawa Kenritsu Ongakudo Hall, Kanagawa Kenmin Hall, Minoh-city Maple Hall, Utsunomiya-city Cultural Hall, Riot Ensemble in the context of Zeitgeist Commissions, Divertimento Ensemble, Ensemble Proton Bern, neuverBand, AsianArt Ensemble, loadbang, Shomyo no Kai - Voices of a Thousand Years, Reigakusha, among others. Her works have been performed at numerous prestigious festivals (Darmstädter Ferienkurse, CRESC... Biennale für Aktuelle Musik Frankfurt Rhein-Main, Ultraschall Berlin, [Tectonics Glasgow](#), Bregenzer Fest Spiele, [Festical Musica](#), Mostra Sonora Sueca, EXPO Milano 2015, Music From Japan, Divertimento Ensemble Rondò, Tongyeong

International Music Festival, Takefu International Music Festival, Tokyo Biennale, and others) and in many other concerts around the world with various ensembles and performers (Enno Poppe and Ensemble Modern, Internationale Ensemble Modern Akademie Ensemble, Trio Accanto, soloists from Ensemble Intercontemporain, Talea Ensemble, Klangforum Wien, Ensemble Musikfabrik, Peter Burwik and ensemble XX. Jahrhundert, Alan Pierson and Alarm Will Sound, Ensemble Mosaik, mdi ensemble, Sentieri selvaggi, Trio Abstrakt, Reigakusha, Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra, Vox humana, Stefan Hussong, Michael Maria Kasper, Johannes Schwarz, Megumi Kasakawa, Marcus Weiss, Nicolas Hodges, Ilya Gringolts, Marco Fusi, William Lang, Claire Chase, Rebekah Heller, Camilla Hoitenga, Aki Takahashi, Toshiya Suzuki, Kosei Murata, Shintaro Ban, Takashi Matsudaira, Norie Tomobuchi, Ayumi Shimonoto, Ko Ishikawa, Naoko Kikuchi, Lisa Kataoka, Hidejiro Honjoh, Reison Kuroda, and others).

In 2024, her first portrait album “[YU KUWABARA: Sounded Voice, Voiced Sound](#)” was released by Kairos. Her works have been broadcast by Deutschlandfunk, SWR2, WDR, ORF, Ö1, BBC Radio 3, BBC Sounds, SRF 2 Kultur, hr2-Kultur, rbb Kultur, NHK-FM, NHK Radio 1, NHK-BS2 etc. The one-hour portrait program titled “Composer Yu Kuwabara, the Old and the new do not contradict each other,” which features her works and activities, was broadcast on Deutschlandfunk (Atelier neuer Musik “Die Komponistin Yu Kuwabara - Neu und alt sind kein Widerspruch”). Her scores are published by [Edition Gravis](#) and [Edition Wunn](#). She is a commissioned composer for [the 6th Takamatsu International Piano Competition](#) in 2026.

In 2021, she was awarded [the 31st Yasushi Akutagawa Suntory Award for Music Composition](#) (formerly known as The Akutagawa Composition Award) for her work *Time Abyss*. She also is the winner of International Composition Competition The Breaking Music 2019 (Milan), the winner of the 5th edition of Divertimento Ensemble’s ‘Franco Donatoni’ International Meeting for Young Composers (2018, Milan), and the winner of neuverBand’s Construct-Radiate International Composition Competition (2018, Basel). She also has been received numerous prizes and selected in numerous other competitions such as Protonwerk, the finalist of the Asian Composers Showcase 2018, the finalist in the Japan Music Competition (2005, 2006 & 2009, Japan), and Tokyo Arts and Space (former Tokyo Wonder Site) Aoyama Creator-in-Residence (2009-10). Furthermore, she is one of the resident composers of [Mizzou International Composers Festival 2020 and 2021](#).

She is currently an associate professor at [Kunitachi College of Music and the Graduate School of Kunitachi College of Music](#). She is also a part-time lecturer at the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music, [Senzoku Gakuen College of Music, and the graduate school of Senzoku Gakuen](#). Also, she is teaching for several composition courses for children by Yamaha Music Foundation.

She has studied composition with Shin Sato and Toshihiko Hisayuki, and completed her master's degree at Tokyo University of the Arts (TUA). She has taken part in prestigious academies, including Lucerne Festival Academy Composer Seminar, Academy Voix Nouvelles Foundation Royaumont, the 9th International Composition Seminar of IEMA, Akademie Schloss Solitude, Delian Academy For New Music, and impuls, among others.

She is one of founding members and a composer of [Awai-Za](#), a chamber ensemble mixed with new music and Japanese Edo culture. Her first portrait concert “[Shadowless - Yu Kuwabara Portrait \[Awai-Za Recital Series Vol.1\]](#)” (→[concert report in Japanese](#)) held at Tokyo Opera City Recital Hall on July 2019 was highly acclaimed. In the fall of 2024, as part of Awai-Za Recital Series Vol. 3: Celebrating Yu Kuwabara's first portrait album release, she held a solo exhibition of music scores in Kyoto entitled “[Yu Kuwabara Solo Exhibition: Sounded Voice, Voiced Sound](#)” and a three-hour-long “[Yu Kuwabara: Kotohogi-e](#)” in Tokyo, both to high acclaim.