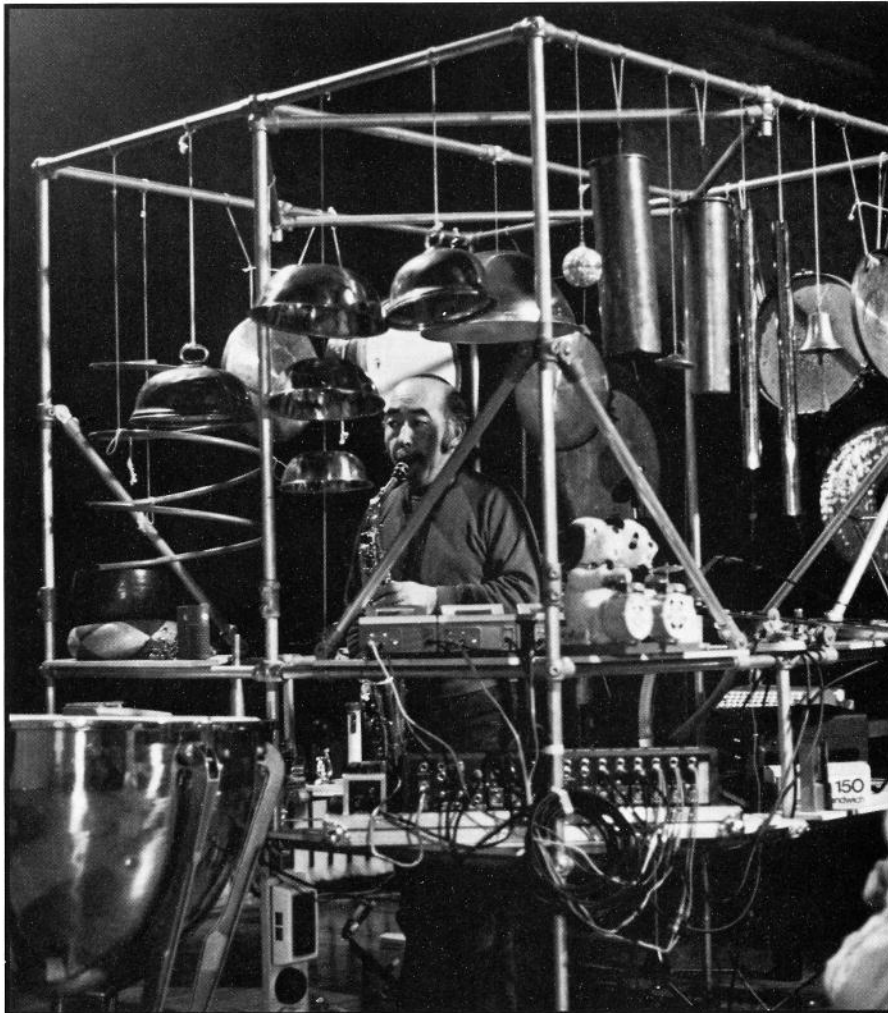


A Teachers' Guide for the Film  
**KUBOTA**



National  
Film Board  
of Canada

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## Film Description

Nobuo Kubota is an architect, sculptor and musician — an artist whose exhibits sometimes take the form of personal performances. This film is Kubota's one-man show of musical notes and noises — a composer's expression of the infinite relationships in sound.

The film opens with Kubota preparing for a performance. Stretching his imagination beyond the confines of conventional musical instrumentation, he converts the most ordinary and unlikely objects into sound-making devices. All are mounted on or suspended from a cage-like structure that becomes Kubota's soundstage.

The filmmaker has condensed the performance and yet enriched and intensified it by sophisticated sound recording and editing. Camera work and picture editing add another dimension, moving from one instrument to another, forward and backward in time, forcing the eyes and mind to keep up with the ears.

Kubota's performance is a stimulation of the senses, an entertaining lesson in listening and a demonstration of the creative process — the formal organization of the raw material of existence. The film does not simply record Kubota's droll performance, but enhances it by using it as the basis of its own creative process.

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## Introduction

We learn about a medium by manipulating it; a potter shapes his clay, a painter mixes colors. Music is no exception, but because the medium — sound — cannot be seen or contained, we often neglect to give students the opportunity to manipulate the materials that make music — sounds and silences.

Students need to see and hear that the business of experimenting with objects and instruments is a kind of play activity — an enjoyable experience by which they learn as they go along. At every stage the "player" builds an understanding of the elements of music — timbre, texture, rhythm, pitch, form, dynamics and style. No amount of showing or telling can substitute for the discoveries the students themselves make about the characteristics and qualities of sound.

The film *Kubota* provides a wonderful demonstration of sound manipulation, or, for younger children, sound "play," and inspires excitement about the creative process. Furthermore, for older students, *Kubota* is an excellent backdrop for discussing what music is, and what is, or is not, "art." *Kubota* not only challenges our perception of music, but encourages a holistic appreciation of what Nobuo Kubota has accomplished in collaboration with the filmmaker.

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## ***Suggestions for Classroom Use of the Film***

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Here are some suggestions for an approach to sound play with children. The process is the same for students of all ages, but the outcome will vary according to the level of understanding, degree of exploration, etc.

### **Introduction/Motivation**

Use one or more suggestion:

- Screen *Kubota*\*.
- Listen to new music (see Discography).
- Explore unusual sound sources.
- Discuss a piece of abstract art.  
What is the parallel in new music?

### **Organize Space**

You will need several spaces:

- A classroom for large group meetings.
- Other areas — stairwells, practice rooms, corridors, etc. — for small-group or individual exploration.

### **Collect Materials**

Anything that makes a sound is a possible instrument:

- Toys
- Kitchen utensils, bowls, etc.
- Items from a work bench
- Whistles, kazoos
- Washboards and tubs, etc.

Have the students hunt for unusual objects with a sound-making potential.

You may wish to limit the number of sounds explored initially. Add traditional sound sources once the students have the notion of using materials in a creative way.

### **Experimental Play**

Allow students time and space, alone or with partners, to discover what sounds each instrument is capable of. In how many different ways can it be played? How many kinds of sounds can it produce? Which sounds do you enjoy most?

Compare the sounds and sound makers and classify them:

- By how they are played
  - blowing
  - shaking or banging
  - plucking, scraping or bowing, etc.
- By materials
  - wood
  - metal
  - glass
  - other
- In terms of musical elements
  - dynamics — loud/soft
  - timbre — qualities
  - pitch — high/low
  - rhythmic potential
  - melodic potential

You may wish to screen *Kubota* again for more ideas.

### **Create Sound Pieces**

Find various ways of putting the sounds together:

- Sound sequences — one after another
- Sound texture — single sounds, layered, alternating
- Sound forms — A,B,A, canon, theme and variation
- Sound colors — choice of instruments

Make groups larger: 3, 4, 5 players.

Explore, improvise — create sound pieces. Have students give their pieces titles or add movement or dance to express their compositions.

### **Evaluation**

- Have groups play for each other.
- Encourage students to listen critically to their own and others' sound pieces.
- Tape the compositions.
- Make scores — by creating anything from primitive symbols to complex graphic representations.

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\* Feel free to screen just a portion of the film, in accordance with students' age and attention span.

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## Tips for Primary Grades

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### Screening the Film

Young children relate very well to the concept of Kubota "playing with sounds." Two or three breaks during the film will be necessary to discuss:

- What do you think Kubota is doing?
- What unusual instruments do you see and hear?
- What sounds are most unique?
- What will happen next?
- Why the "black outs"?
- Do you think this is music? Why?

### A Sound House

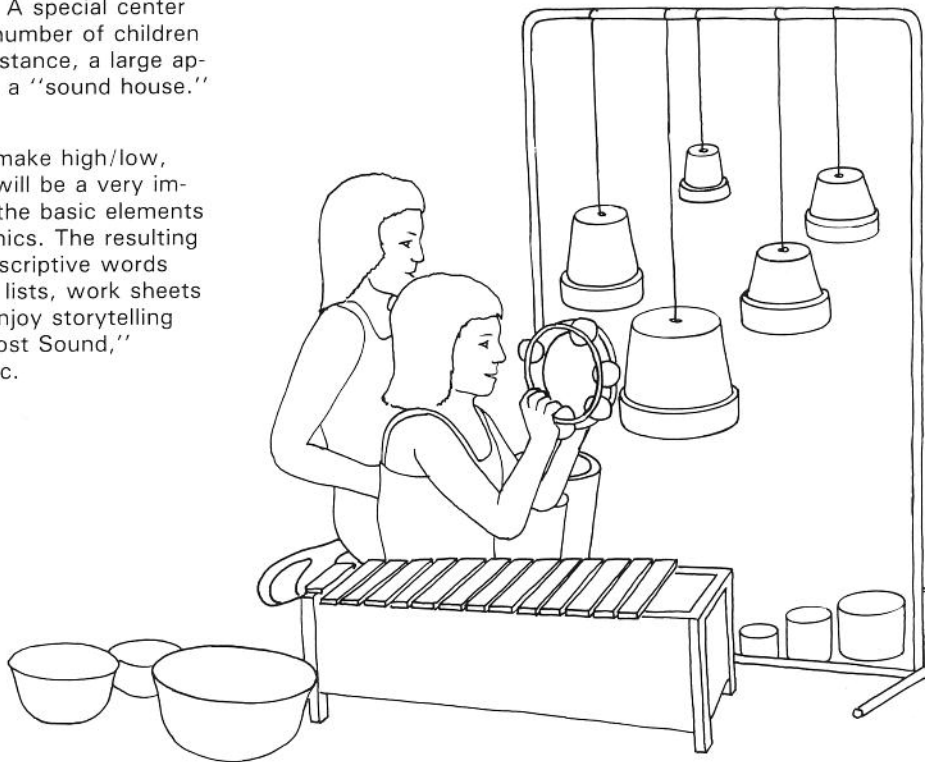
The main phase of development for young children will be the experimental play stage. A special center can be set up so that only a small number of children are involved at any one time. For instance, a large appliance box could be converted into a "sound house."

### Sounds Elements

Discoveries about which objects make high/low, long/short, smooth/jagged sounds will be a very important part of the play. These are the basic elements of tone, color, pitch, rhythm, dynamics. The resulting vocabulary of sound objects and descriptive words should be incorporated into spelling lists, work sheets and creative writing. Children will enjoy storytelling and writing on such topics as "A Lost Sound," "Sounds of a Mysterious Cave," etc.

### Sound Movement

Movement is a wonderful way for a) children to experience the qualities and characteristics of sound and b) the teacher to observe how well the children are listening and interpreting. Choose a few contrasting sounds to move to in the gymnasium or large open area. A cymbal played with a soft mallet will elicit an explosive beginning, flowing through to a less clearly defined ending as the sound fades away. Contrast with a short pattern on a woodblock and again with the swishy sound of sand blocks used in a rhythmic circular motion.



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## Tips for Junior Grades

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### Screening the Film

Questions such as those suggested for the primary group can be considered before viewing the film and during breaks in the screening.

### Creative Music Projects

Start with a focus on timbre and texture, avoiding melody-making instruments in the beginning (use cymbals, bells, wind chimes, tubes, whistles, percussion instruments). Remind the children of Kubota who produced sound colors and textures — not melodies. As partners or groups improvise, listen, and respond to one another, sound discoveries relating to musical elements should be noted and discussed.

Students may be interested in keeping a permanent record of a piece or pieces by a) tape recording the selection, or b) drawing a score or graphic representation for the piece (the notion that squiggles and doodles can be made to represent sound qualities, pitch levels, duration and dynamics in time and space is central to formal music reading). Listen to *Music Builders V* (see Discography) for recorded examples of improvised sound pieces.

### Science Projects

Some discoveries in the students' sound explorations may relate to science (eg. the relationship between a length of pipe or string and pitch). Many reference books are available for those interested in the science of sound. This interest may lead to instrument making.



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## **Tips for Intermediate and Senior Grades    Discography**

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### **Screening the Film**

After the initial screening, frequent returns to *Kubota* will heighten the awareness of older students regarding the juxtapositions of sounds and sound sources, and the wide range of dynamics, moods and expressive input of Kubota himself.

### **Some Questions for Discussion**

- How has the structure of the film changed or modified the performance?
- Kubota has created a unique sound environment. How does the environment influence your perception of music (consider a concert hall, classroom, shower, subway, street, coffee house, living room, car, wilderness setting, etc.)?
- Wine glasses, sheet metal, spoons, washboards, oil drums, anvils, and other relatively common objects have been used for making music. Do you think foreknowledge of the "instruments" used (in a recording, for example) to create unique sounds alters your appreciation of the music produced?

### **Creative Music Projects**

The experimental phase for this age group *may* be short and the composition phase *may* be long. Electronic manipulation is often of particular interest to older students. Students can experiment with relatively easy tape manipulations such as overdubbing, reversing tape sections, cutting and editing random or specific tapes pieces of about 2 to 5 cm (as raw material) for more sophisticated compositional effects.

For specific sound experiments and listening examples refer to *Sound and Silence* (see Reference Books). The Canadian percussion ensemble Nexus exemplifies the "sound play" experience.

### **Music of Nexus**

A variety of selections — improvised and composed, suitable for all levels. This recording, the following recording, and a catalogue are available from: Nexus, Box 100, Norland, Ontario KOM 2L0.

### **Changes**

The members of Nexus play four major contemporary works for percussion. Best suited to Intermediate/Secondary levels.

### **Music Builders V**

Unit for Junior Grades on setting up a creative sound project including two short improvisations by members of Nexus. Of particular interest to Primary/Junior and Junior High students. Distributed by: GLC, 115 Nuggett Avenue, Agincourt, Ontario M1S 3B1.

### **Sound and Silence**

Recorded selections of student projects. Of interest to Junior/High/Secondary levels. Published by: Cambridge University Press. Distributed by: Macmillan of Canada.

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## Reference Books

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Alfaenger, Peter. *Make Your Own Music*. Toronto: Groundwood Books, 1981.  
A good resource for Primary and Junior teachers and students.

Paynter, John and Aston, Peter. *Sound and Silence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.  
Classroom projects in creative music for Intermediate/Secondary School students. Distributed in Canada by Macmillan.

Schafer, R. Murray. *The Composer in the Classroom*. Toronto: Berandol Music.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Ear Cleaning*. Berandol Music.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The New Soundscape*. Berandol Music.

\_\_\_\_\_. *When Words Sing*. Berandol Music.

These four books by Murray Schafer will be of interest to Junior/Intermediate teachers. The address of Berandol Music is 15 St. Joseph Street, Toronto, Ontario.

Walther, Tom. *Make Mine Music*. Boston and Toronto: Little Brown, 1981.

Especially suited to the Junior/Intermediate school setting with science integration (focus on cause and effects of sounds, and altering sounds).

Wolde, Gunilla. *Shake, Rattle, and Bang*. London: A & C Black, 1975.

A Primary resource book for reading and creating music.

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## Related Films

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*Bing Bang Boom* 106B 0169 060 24:18  
Murray Schafer works with a Grade 7 class to make music without instruments.

*Dots* 106C 0149 018 2:23  
*Loops* 106C 0152 023 3:15  
Films by Norman McLaren, in which the sound track is drawn on the film.

*Pen Point Percussion* 106B 0151 035 5:58  
Norman McLaren demonstrates how he "draws" sound tracks.

## ***Kubota***

16 mm Color

106C 0382 077

Screening time: 20 minutes 13 seconds

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