

Hiroya Tsukamoto to present solo guitar concert at Bop Stop

by Mike Telin



When guitarist [Hiroya Tsukamoto](#) presents his solo concert at the [BOP STOP](#) on Thursday, September 22nd at 8:00 pm, audiences will hear music that has been described as ‘cinematic guitar poetry.’ His music has also been referred to as ‘earthy, organic soundscapes that impart a mood of peace and tranquility.’

“I’ll be playing a mix of eclectic acoustic music,” Tsukamoto said

during a recent telephone conversation. “I try to make the concerts a trip that takes listeners somewhere nice.”

Tsukamoto’s mix of musical styles have their roots in his life and musical experiences. Growing up in Kyoto, Japan, he began playing the five-string banjo, and was introduced to the music of Bluegrass legend Earl Scruggs. “When I was thirteen years old my dad bought me a banjo,” the guitarist recalled. “I had never seen the instrument before, but I kind of liked the look of it. And nobody in my town was playing it, so I tried.”

A year later he began to study guitar because his friends were all playing the instrument, although he continued to play the banjo. What were his friends think about the banjo? “They were very surprised by the instrument and its sound. ‘What is this?’ they’d ask. I was also showing off by playing a few banjo licks. But people were interested because it was so unusual.”

Tsukamoto’s life and musical experiences took an interesting turn when he spent a summer in Mexico at the age of fifteen. “There were two boys who were just a little

older than me who both played the guitar so well. They gave me some lessons, and they taught me some Spanish. That got me into Latin American culture, and the experience made me want to study the culture and the language more.”

In 1994 he entered The Osaka University where he majored in Spanish, and was introduced to the musical and social movement in South America called [Nueva Canción](#), spearheaded by musical legends such as Victor Jara and Violeta Parra. “While I was at University I was studying South American history — the politics and the music — and one of the professors had a group that he invited me to join. That was when I was first introduced to that music. I ended up writing my graduate thesis on Nueva Canción Chilena and folk music.”

Although the movement has strong political and social themes, Tsukamoto said that he does not focus on the political implications associated with the music but simply enjoys it as an art form. “I really just like the music,” he said. “It is sort of like the protest folk music in the United States during the 1960s with Pete Seeger and those musicians.”

In 2000 he received a scholarship to Boston’s Berklee College of Music. “When I was still at University in Osaka I started playing with a group that played a mixture of styles. The leader was a saxophone player who was studying at Berklee and he told me about how good life was in the United States. He said that if I went there to study I would become a better musician, so I thought about it and decided to take the audition.

While at Berklee he studied guitar and composition with legendary contemporary jazz and composition teacher Mick Goodrick. “Studying with him was very inspiring. Before that, I thought that music should be very natural and played from the heart. But he sees music more mathematically and systematically. In the beginning I was very confused, but I realized that his thinking is very clear, and I began to see music very differently. That was kind of like the sky opening up for me.”

When he first began performing professionally, Tsukamoto focused his concert programs on his own compositions. That was until he had the opportunity to play at some folk festivals in the U.S. “Some of the organizers asked me if I could play some Japanese folk music, and I thought it would be a good chance to rediscover Japanese folk music. Since then I’ve has been including it on most of my concerts.”

Currently living in New York, the guitarist moved there with the intention of becoming a jazz musician. And while he was inspired by all of the young, talented musicians he heard, he realized that he wanted to reconnect with the music of his past. “That’s when I began to incorporate everything into my music.”

How does Hiroya Tsukamoto describe his music? “It is hard to explain what I do and sometimes people don’t get it, so I just call myself a fingerstyle acoustic guitar player. That’s the simplest description. But I do add that I perform a mixture of styles.”

Published on ClevelandClassical.com September 20, 2016.

Click here for a printable copy of this article

[Return to the Front Page.](#)