

ONDES MARTENOT

On October 8th, Ipswich Arts Association was able to hold its only concert during the pandemic period of 2020. This was a performance by Malcolm Ball, professional percussionist and music educationalist, on the Ondes Martenot, with Peter Humphrey on the piano. Because the audience was necessarily so small, we are pleased to bring some extracts from this concert to a wider audience.

Before the concert, Malcolm told us a little of the history of this fascinating instrument.

There are only about 6 of these instruments in this country (Malcolm Ball has two of them and Johnny Greenwood of Radiohead has one), which were invented by Maurice Martenot, a French WW1 radio engineer and cellist. He was fascinated by radio oscillations, and thought that it must be possible to create something musical from them. He worked on what became known as the Ondes Martenot, which in 1928 was presented to the Paris opera as a complete musical instrument. He continued to develop it until his death in 1980.

It is a complex instrument. The right hand uses a ribbon or the keyboard to find the pitch - both of which are capable of the player's personal vibrato – whilst the left hand uses a 'touche' button which controls the dynamics and attack. There are also different stops which vary the tone – eg string, nasal, mellow.

There are four different speakers – one is a plain speaker, one a reverberation speaker, a metallic gong speaker, and the fourth has resonating strings. These can be used in different combinations.

It requires great expertise, acquired over many years, to play this instrument.

Find out more at: www.malcolmball.co.uk