

# Rides along Billy Wolff Trail inspired UNL jazz student's winning composition

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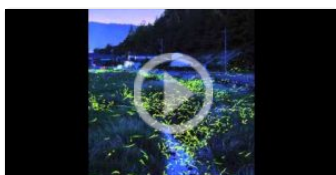


Masayoshi Ishikawa, a jazz composition doctoral student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Glenn Korff School of Music, won a 2014 Downbeat Student Music Award in Graduate Composition for Small Ensemble for his song "Hotaru."

May 11, 2014 11:00 pm • By Cory Matteson | Lincoln Journal Star

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## Related Video



Masayoshi Ishikawa - Hotaru (firefly)

Online

The Billy Wolff Trail runs for 9.112 miles, snaking from Truchard Road and Nebraska 2 past Holmes Lake to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus, but Masayoshi Ishikawa only hooked onto it for about 10 blocks a day when the UNL doctoral student in music arts lived near 50th and Randolph streets.

He moved there during the first semester of his first year at Nebraska, the most recent of four schools in four states that he has attended since coming from Japan to the U.S. 11 years ago to study jazz composition. His first fall here, he rode the trail daily as part of his commute to and from school. During

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To listen to Ishikawa's award-winning composition, go to [JournalStar.com](http://JournalStar.com).

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the rides home, around 7 or 8 at night, he said, he found himself inspired by the ride.

"The grasses turn brown, and the breeze is gentle, and I would hear crickets singing," he said in a UNL release. "It was a

beautiful view, but also somewhat melancholy. While biking on this trail, I somehow thought of 'hotaru,' a firefly in Japanese. I knew fireflies usually appear in summer, but my imagination of fireflies dancing around the trail kept growing more and more in my mind. I found out that once fireflies become adults, they only live for a week or two."

Ishikawa said the rides helped bring out some subconscious thoughts about the nature of life and death. From there, the pianist began to compose a jazz piece, "Hotaru," that runs nearly identically as long (nine minutes, 12 seconds) as the trail.

Last week, Downbeat Magazine announced that Ishikawa's Billy Wolff Trail-inspired piece won the 2014 Downbeat Student Music Award in Graduate Composition for Small Ensemble. The list of winners appears in the June 2014 issue of the jazz and blues magazine.

"Masayoshi is an extremely gifted and creative composer-arranger," Eric Richards, Associate Professor of Composition and Jazz Studies, said in a release. "He meticulously crafts each of his works, carefully considering the interaction of multiple dimensions of melody, harmony, rhythm, timbre and improvisation. Most importantly, he is one of the kindest and most humane young musicians I have ever had the pleasure of mentoring. He has the talent and potential to become a major voice in jazz composition and arranging."

Ishikawa said he never set out to win an award with "Hotaru," and wanted to thank the professors (Richards and Tom Larson, among others) and fellow graduate students who helped him perform and record the piece. Six UNL musicians -- Russell Zimmer (flugel horn), Bobby Fuson II (soprano sax), Dave Stamps (trombone), Chris Varga (drums), Aaron Stroessner (guitar) and Jeff Utter (double bass) -- performed with Ishikawa on "Hotaru," and he said they helped him put into music the thoughts he had about the glowing, lively and brief dance of the firefly.

As did the trail, he said.

"I love that place," Ishikawa said.

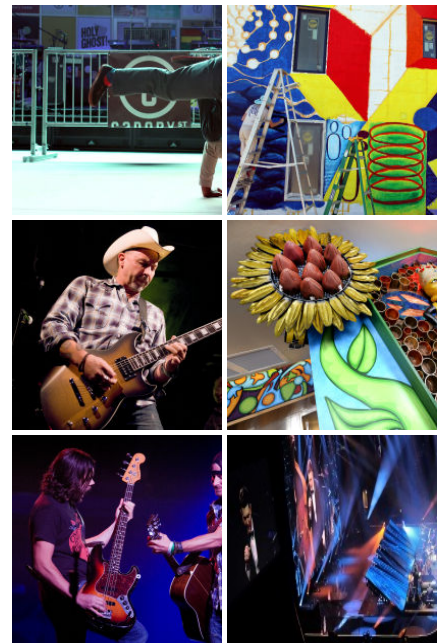
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