

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

VISION OF THE WAVES

**"Sound itself, even in its immateriality, is only form.
Reality is what we put in it."**

— Maurice Martenot

Where does the ethereal cry of the ondes Martenot come from? From electricity. Invisible matter, a universal force, vibrates through the sky, the earth, the body... human intervention comes in and, suddenly, it becomes a musical voice. This is the encounter that *Wavemakers* relates —told through the work and instrument of Maurice Martenot, a musician and tinkerer, but above all a passionate educator.

The ondes Martenot seeped into my life as I was completing *The Phantom of the Operator* (2004). While we were searching for a musical colour to give an overall tone to the film, my colleague, the editor Annie Jean, recalled the existence of an old electronic instrument with the strange name of "ondes Martenot" —which, translated literally, means "Martenot waves." And so began my quest to find, hear, see, and understand these "waves".

It was through Montréal ondist Suzanne Binet-Audet that I finally came upon the instrument, and came under its spell. As impressed as I was by the finesse and unbridled genius of Binet-Audet's playing (the "Jimi Hendrix of the Martenot"), I was also occasionally overcome by the quarter-tones and what seemed to be the sometimes "too lyrical" vibrato of the Martenot itself. Its incredibly pure tones had the power to evoke sudden emotion in me, arisen from who knows where. So, having developed a rapport with this instrument that can leave no one indifferent —and whose infinitely diverse range of timbres will never cease to amaze me— I found that I, too, had been bitten by the Martenot bug.

As I toured film festivals around the world with *Phantom of the Operator*, the ether waves of the Martenot followed me. Inevitably, during Q&As, I was asked about the film's mysterious soundtrack. Rather than trying to explain the complex instrument workings and its obscure history, I quickly came to sense that this was a story best to reveal with the means of cinema. And with the *Phantom of the Operator*'s poster with its phantom waves, was the muse not in fact gazing dreamily toward this next project?

While *Wavemakers* presents the ondes Martenot on the big screen for the first time, the film is not strictly speaking about a musical instrument. As the documentary filmmaker Pierre Perrault said, "*I pursue the pursuits of Men, and not the object of their pursuits.*" An extension of the senses for those who play it, and an intriguing interface for those trying to rebuild it or examine it under science's microscope, the ondes Martenot is an *instrument of revelation*; it is, as I hope this film will be, an interface through which we can catch a glimpse of the vibrations of human imagination.

WAVEMAKERS

In the back of the documentary filmmaker's mind is often an underlying creative tension: to take a subject to further one's aim to create a film as an expression of one's vision, or to serve the subject itself by making a film, by giving it "a voice" in its own terms. With *Wavemakers*, I made the choice not to choose. I wanted to portray the Martenot's universe, remaining somehow faithful to it —or, more precisely, keeping true to its spirit. But, while the instrument is still a well-guarded secret from another time, not well known to younger generations, I wanted to depict its legacy in a timely way. Though long associated with rarefied classical and contemporary music, the Martenot is anything but a vintage instrument of musical effects, and I also strove to present its repertoire in its less conventional, more popular, or surprising variations.

For me, modulating the form of a documentary film to its "subject" is the best way to avoid falling into the prevailing *ready-to-see* documentary moulds. Letting the "subject" come out on its own terms gave way to the tone, the style and the very structure of the film's narrative: musical, flowing, broad in range and with a long breath. More importantly, *Wavemakers* is an open work whose structure allows viewers to find both immediate and more distant resonances. In the end, the film eludes categorization: not a musical documentary, a historical portrait, an experimental audiovisual essay, pure *vérité*, nor simply a film about a musical instrument.

**"They're approaches, right? They're all approximations.
Then there's one that's really close...
that's the sound that brings us close to something."**

— Suzanne Binet-Audet

Wavemakers is the result of six years of research and interacting with people involved with the Martenot in Québec, France and Japan. Their sense of curiosity, their attachment to the instrument's artisanal and somewhat uncontrollable aspects, their humour, and their love for a job well done inspired and coloured the long-term process I adopted with my collaborators. It is an honour for me to help preserve this heritage and spread the word about the instrument, and to reveal Martenot and his instrument as one of the missing links in our understanding of the history of 20th-century music. But most of all, I hope that *Wavemakers* will resonate with and in you. As Maurice Martenot liked to say, "*the instrument is first and foremost ourselves...*"