

GLOBE UNITY: JAPAN



Iruman

Akira Sakata/Giovanni di Domenico (Mbari Musica)
Two City Blues, Vol. 2

Peter Brötzmann/Jim O'Rourke/Keiji Haino (Trost)
Surely

Makiko Hirabayashi/Klavs Hovman/Marilyn Mazur
(Enja/Yellowbird)
by Tom Greenland

Japan has long been one of the leading supporters of jazz, initially looking to North American artists for leadership, but more and more coming into its own as a source of innovative artists and music.

Alto saxophonist Akira Sakata has been known for his explosive style over the last 40 years, but *Iruman*, his recent duet outing with Italian pianist Giovanni di Domenico, is a comparatively sedate affair. The opening tracks, of short and medium length, insinuate themselves gently upon the listener in slow-rolling climaxes and light banter. Sakata's tone is edgy but poised, his clarinet sound muffled but keening and several tracks feature his hoarse-voiced, theatrical singing style. "Moe I/Bud I" has all-out skronking, but the most effective moments — on "Lotus Blossom in an Old Pond", "Water Coming into the Rice Field in Spring", "The Peaceful Atmosphere of a Wood Sukiya-style Temple" and "Papuruma" — derive their impact through less forceful means, a result of close simpatico. The epic finale, "Moe II/Bud II", turns up the intensity once again, navigating through a series of episodes that range from high excitement to relative tedium.

Vocalist/guitarist Keiji Haino, active in experimental music since the '70s, enlisted fellow guitarist and Tokyoite Jim O'Rourke (originally from Chicago) and German saxophonist Peter Brötzmann for an exciting night at the Shinjuku Pit Inn. *Two City Blues, Vol. 2* presents the second of two sets: a 49-minute blowout rendition of the title track followed by a terser yet equally tense closer, "One Fine Day". Haino begins the former strumming a samisen (three-stringed fretless lute) in tandem with O'Rourke's blues-inflected slide guitar, suddenly breaking into screeching vocals that closely match Brötzmann's hoarse-throated tenor saxophone, then switching to highly processed electric guitar. Pentatonic melodies suggesting G minor later move to C minor, concluding in the relative major key of Bb. Along the way, anything and everything happens, most of it based on dialogue between Haino and O'Rourke, with Brötzmann weaving in and out, occasionally blasting to the fore.

Tokyo-born pianist Makiko Hirabayashi now lives in Copenhagen, where she's often collaborated with bassist Klavs Hovman and percussionist/vocalist Marilyn Mazur. *Surely*, her third release with the husband-and-wife rhythm team, is highly accessible, containing infectious melodies, bouncy rhythms and light textures. The title track, powered by a 6/8 hand-drum pattern, creates a chamber-jazz mood; "Stepping On It" is rambunctious and playful; and "Ode to Okinawa" has a rolling gospel feel. Mazur's sure touch on a host of percussion instruments and her airy scat vocals form a strong but sensitive counterpoint to Hirabayashi's compositions and improvisations while Hovman provides restrained support.

For more information, visit mbarimusica.com, trost.at and jazzrecords.com/enja



Made in Brazil
Eliane Elias (Concord)
by Andrew Véléz

Made in Brazil is the first album Elaine Elias has recorded in her native country since moving to the United States in 1981. The multi-Grammy nominated pianist, keyboardist, singer, composer and arranger is in fine company, including Brazilian musicians, composers, guest performances from the multi-Grammy Award-winning gospel vocal group Take 6 plus some skillful overdubbing by members of the London Symphony Orchestra.

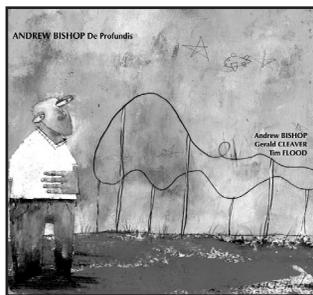
Two standards by Ary Barroso bookend the set. "Brazil" is virtually a Brazilian anthem and Elias' smoothly sensuous vocal and a glowing Fender Rhodes accompaniment is complemented by a diaphanous string arrangement for a totally infectious samba rhythm. "No Tabuleiro de Baiana", another Barroso tune also dating back to the '30s, is the set closer. Elias' piano playing is vivacious as her dexterous vocal swings and rides on top of the samba beat.

Composer Roberto Menescal accompanies Elias on guitar for two of his songs. On "Voce" they croon the romantic lyrics of the 1963 bossa nova hit in English with a string arrangement sweeping them along. Her vigorous piano makes perfect trimming for the flirtatious delight.

For Jobim's epochal "Aguas de Marco" ("Waters of March"), perhaps the most recorded of Brazilian tunes, Elias brings an R&B-inflected midtempo arrangement to the stream-of-conscious lyrics, with ebullient backing from Take 6. She does a blending of Jobim's "Este Seu Olhar" and "Promessas" accompanied by bassist Marc Johnson, guitarist Marcus Teixeira and drummer Edu Ribeiro to heartfelt effect.

Vocalist Mark Kibble, Take 6's arranger, sings with Elias on her tune "Incendiando". With English and Brazilian woven seamlessly, the romantic tension is as palpable as it is tasteful. It's a pleasure to surrender to Elias' seductive vocalizing. Throughout this is music that, to quote Jobim, is "a joy in your heart."

For more information, visit concordmusicgroup.com. Elias is at Birdland Apr. 7th-11th. See Calendar.



De Profundis
Andrew Bishop (Envoi)
by Elliott Simon

De Profundis (From the Depths), one of 15 Biblical Songs of Ascent (coming from Judaism), inspired Renaissance composer Josquin Des Prez to write some of the most gloriously 'spooky' choral music of the early 16th Century. This release, from multi-instrumentalist Andrew Bishop, titled after the aforementioned Psalm, dedicates 6 of its 11 pieces to 're-imaginings' of Des Prez' music. The remaining tracks impress as highly personal, yet just as spiritual, imaginings of a somewhat different sort.

Bishop is a highly skilled bass clarinetist and the warm rich tone that flows from his horn is the star of the Des Prez compositions. Bishop augments the bass clarinet on opener "Introit" by the instrument's own overtones and on closer "Benedictus" by bassist Tim Flood's complementary rich style. Through such presentations the bass clarinet cultivates its role as the keeper of the music's mysterious spirituality. The title cut is an exception as Bishop joins with Flood and percussionist Gerald Cleaver for an all-out spiritual squawk. Bishop then switches to flute and cleverly renders the last gasps of a dusky "Fleeting Light" before the creatures of the night take over.

The remaining non-Des Prez composed tracks lean toward more familiar improvised contemporary jazz territory. In this milieu, Bishop displays both hot chops and a tender touch on clarinet, soprano and tenor saxophones. The unbridled energy in "Falling Up"; hip yet hesitant swinging of "Bottled"; tenderness and tension of "The Muse"; and twin messages of strength and sensitivity articulated by bass and flute on "Six Days, Five Nights" are all extended portraits organically evolving into personal stories. "There are Many Monkeys", with soprano over a plodding rhythm, and the ascending tenor tension and swinging beat of "Now What" are a couple of blow-fests that round out the session.

From the depths of Bishop's own emotion, experience and compositional acumen as well as the shadowy beginnings of polyphony during the Renaissance, *De Profundis* impresses with its astute combination of musicianship, spirituality and compositional insight.

For more information, visit envoirecordings.com. This project is at Cornelia Street Café Apr. 8th. See Calendar.

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