

Makiko Hirabayashi Trio/ "Where The Sea Breaks"

Liner notes by Kazutomi Aoki

There are many fine pianists from Japan, but more than anyone, Makiko Hirabayashi invites you to the musical universe of wonder, where the depths and forms of the human emotions are revealed, and become landscapes where stories are told. Rather than merely resonating with the pleasures, fun, anger or sadness in life and leading you to identify with the music, this music is born from deeper relationships between the human and the world that we live in, that you might be able to see from a little distance. In other words, despite being aware of the way we live our daily lives, each isolated with all our anxieties, I see in Makiko Hirabayashi a musician, who has the curiosity to furiously crave to see the wonder of living in this world.

She is generally known as a jazz pianist, but in fact, she may be the one that finds this most confusing. Jazz definitely has an important place in her career. Most of all, it was her album, *Hide And Seek*, released by the German jazz label, Enja, that won Best Album of The Year in a jazz magazine, and made her known to the Japanese public. If we go further back, she has studied at the famous jazz institution in Boston, Berklee College Of Music. However, her intention then was not to study to become a jazz musician. Her interest lay in composing since her high school years, and having decided that she might as well study composition abroad, she chose to travel to the US. For someone who had spent her high school years in Hong Kong, it was apparently not a big problem to overcome this kind of hurdle. After meeting a Danish guitarist in the US, her next choice fell just as easily on Scandinavia, following her interest in the Nordic countries. She enjoyed taking part in numerous projects after arriving there, but felt that her field of expression was in world music. Then in 2001, she formed her trio with Marilyn Mazur and Klavs Hovman. She had been experimenting with playing different instruments, including the violin which she also had picked up in her childhood, and synthesizers, but the fact that she ended up forming this trio was probably a good thing for her, and for the world of jazz.

Ofcourse, it did not mean that she would play jazz standards from *The Great American Songbook*. She may enjoy playing jazz standards from time to time, but they do not appear in her body of work as a musician. From a certain point, and especially in Europe, music based on improvisation, without the traditional frames of jazz, had been established as jazz as a more free form of expression, and here, she was able to fit right in.

The important collaborator in this group, Marilyn Mazur, also represents this kind of musician. Mazur was born in New York, but immigrated to Denmark at the age of 6. As a child, she played the violin, piano and even danced ballet, but later became drawn to rock and jazz, and hooked on playing the drums. She went on to developing her own musical universe with her collection of percussion instruments from all over the world, also with the influence of world music. Playing with Miles Davis group for 3 years after taking part in a

recording session with him, made her world famous. She travelled the globe with Miles, and was consequently on tour in Japan, but her first tour in Japan was with Wayne Shorter, and this proves how sought-after she was as a musician in this period. But Mazur threw all this away, in order to form her own group. She chose to pave the way for a career as a musician/composer, rather than a performer.

Hirabayashi and Mazur share the key element, world music, but as opposed to merely making music in the way you design a patchwork of ethnic costumes, this music is more about the world itself, and about stories, based on dialogues between the artist as an individual and the world. One of Marilyn Mazur's important collaborators, Jan Garbarek has once said that Mazur is like the wind. Both the world and ourselves in it are in constant motion. Perhaps it can be said that this music is made by listening carefully to the wind, and while riding on this wind, transforming what appears as shapes of our hearts deep within ourselves into sounds.

Music on this album is made of stories that exist on the other side of this delicate, cloudy veil of wind. The compositions are written by Hirabayashi and Mazur, and in addition, there are improvised tracks by the whole group. By the way, if we can call these improvisations, then that in itself should be enough to call it jazz, but this kind of arguments about what improvisation is seems completely irrelevant now. The melodies in the compositions are completely stripped down, and float, as if they are footsteps left by the wind. This floating atmosphere sets the musicians off on dialogues with the world, and is what characterizes this album with a more seductive sound universe than hitherto. The beautiful sense of floating is further enhanced by the presence of voice and flügelhorn.

Hirabayashi has recently collaborated with Enrico Rava from Italy, and you may find that this experience is reflected on this album. Many would be reminded of Rava's playing by listening to the wonderful flügelhorn playing of the guest musician, Jakob Buchanan. This is not to say that they play in a similar way, but that Buchanan responds so naturally to the floating atmosphere of the album, and that may be a reflection of her having played with Rava. The chance to perform with Enrico Rava came about last year, where Rava toured with a Japanese group to celebrate 150 years' diplomatic relationship between Italy and Japan. She was later invited to perform with him in Denmark, and in October, she will be playing duo concerts and guesting his group in Italy.

Hearing this story, one is reminded of the mysterious ways music works. The collaboration with Mazur in her group that has lasted since 2001 can be called a crucial meeting of artists who share a common idea of music, but as in the way Hirabayashi describes her meeting with Rava's music as being shaken at the core of her heart, these meetings between humans and musical worlds seem to happen by intuition, where the sudden, accidental happenings bear strange, new lives, that grow steadily in emotional depth and beauty, to be spread in the world around them. These things convince me that as Makiko

Hirabayashi slowly goes further out and widens her own world, she will be reaching at what lies at the core of the matter.

Lastly, as the high quality of the recordings by this trio was talked about when they won a prize for their sound in Japan, this wonderful recording has also captured the beauty of delicate details, as well as the ever accelerating dynamism of their imagination.