

HIROMI - Biography

Since her 2003 Telarc debut, *Another Mind*, keyboardist-composer Hiromi Uehara has electrified audiences and critics on both hemispheres with a creative energy that defies the conventional parameters of jazz and pushes musicianship and composition to unprecedented levels of complexity and sophistication.

The initial buzz – critical and commercial – triggered by *Another Mind* in North America traveled all the way back to her native Japan, where the album shipped gold (100,000 units) and received the Recording Industry Association of Japan's (RIAJ) Jazz Album of the Year Award. And yet, for as high-impact as Hiromi's debut may have been, it was just the beginning of a fascinating musical journey that has continued to gather momentum in the years since.

Her second release, *Brain*, won the Horizon Award at the 2004 Surround Music Awards, *Swing Journal's* New Star Award, *Jazz Life's* Gold Album, HMV Japan's Best Japanese Jazz Album, and the Japan Music Pen Club's Japanese Artist Award (the JMPC is a classical/jazz journalists club). *Brain* was also named Album of the Year in *Swing Journal's* 2005 Readers Poll. In 2006, Hiromi won Best Jazz Act at the Boston Music Awards and the Guinness Jazz Festival's Rising Star Award. She also claimed Jazzman of the Year, Pianist of the Year and Album of the Year in *Swing Journal Japan's* Readers Poll for her 2006 release, *Spiral*. She continued her winning streak with the release of *Time Control* in 2007 and *Beyond Standard* in 2008. Both releases featured Sonicbloom, her hand-picked supergroup that included guitarist Dave "Fuze" Fiuczynski, bassist Tony Grey and drummer Martin Valihora.

Her output in 2009 has been extensive. She appears on Chick Corea's *Duet*, a two-disc live recording of a performance in Tokyo with pianist and mentor Chick Corea. Released in February on Concord, *Duet* is a collaboration by two artists from separate generations and cultures who transcend all boundaries to converse with each other with exuberance and passion. She also appeared on bassist Stanley Clarke's *Jazz in the Garden*, a May release on Heads Up International. *Jazz in the Garden* – which also features drummer Lenny White – is Clarke's first foray into straightahead jazz, and the synergy resulting from all three of these luminaries makes for one of the most refreshing Stanley Clarke recordings in recent years.

In June 2009, she simultaneously released two concert DVDs, both recorded in Tokyo: *Hiromi Live in Concert* (recorded in December 2005) and *Hiromi's Sonicbloom Live in Concert* (recorded in December 2007). The former features the rhythm section of Grey and Valihora, while the latter includes Fiuczynski incendiary fretwork – the perfect foil for Hiromi's high-energy keyboard attack.

Hiromi scales back to the solo piano setting – but sacrifices none of her innate energy or passion in the process – with her latest album, *A Place To Be*. Set for Japanese release in September 2009 and U.S. release in January 2010, *A Place To Be* is a musical travel journal of the many places around the world that have left an indelible impression on her creative sensibilities.

"Some places have such a special vibe," she says of her extensive travels over the past several years. "Sometimes a melody emerges in and around a place without me having to think about it at all. I can just walk down the street and I hear it. I'm always thinking about composing, and always trying to find what parts of the world around me can be musical. Sometimes it just comes to me in a beautiful moment."

This openness to the vibrations of her surroundings is nothing new for Hiromi. Born in

Shizuoka, Japan, in 1979, she took her first piano lessons at age six. She learned from her earliest piano teacher to tap into the intuitive as well as the technical aspects of music. “Her energy was always so high, and she was so emotional,” she says of that first teacher. “When she wanted me to play with a certain kind of dynamics, she wouldn’t say it with technical terms. If the piece was something passionate, she would say, ‘Play red.’ Or if it was something mellow, she would say, ‘Play blue.’ I could really play from my heart that way, and not just from my ears.”

Hiromi came to the United States in 1999 to study at the Berklee College of Music in Boston, an environment that pushed the limits of her artistic sensibilities even further. “It expanded so much the way I see music,” she says. “Some people dig jazz, some people dig classical music, some people dig rock. Everyone is so concerned about who they like. They always say, ‘*This* guy is the best,’ ‘No, *this* guy is the best.’ But I think everyone is great. I really don’t have barriers to any type of music. I could listen to everything from metal to classical music to anything else.”

Among her mentors at Berklee was veteran jazz bassist Richard Evans, who teaches arranging and orchestration. Evans co-produced *Another Mind* with longtime friend and collaborator Ahmad Jamal, who has also taken a personal interest in Hiromi’s artistic development. “She is nothing short of amazing,” says Jamal. “Her music, together with her overwhelming charm and spirit, causes her to soar to unimaginable musical heights.”

Hiromi’s new album, *A Place To Be*, is more than just a chronicle of the many places around the globe where she has performed. Recorded just days before her thirtieth birthday in March 2009, it also represents a personal milestone. “I wanted to record the sound of my twenties for archival purposes,” she says. “I felt like the people whom I met on the road during my twenties really helped me develop and mature as a musician and as a person. So in addition to making a record that represented all of these places that have inspired my music, I also wanted it to be a thank-you to those people. I feel very fortunate to have spent this part of my life traveling to all these places and making people happy.”

Part of the personal connection she has established over the years is the result of making music without labels or restrictions. As a matter of principle, she’ll continue to follow whatever moves her – be it a place, a person, an idea or whatever else – and leave the definitions to others.

“I don’t want to put a name on my music,” she says. “Other people can put a name on what I do. It’s just the union of what I’ve been listening to and what I’ve been learning. It has some elements of classical music, it has some rock, it has some jazz, but I don’t want to give it a name.”

Telarc Discography

Another Mind (2003) CD-83558
Brain (2004) CD-83600
Spiral (2006) CD-83631
Time Control (2007) CD-83655
Beyond Standard (2008) CD-83686
Hiromi Live in Concert (2009) DVD-73698
Hiromi’s Sonicbloom Live in Concert (2009) DVD-73699
A Place To Be (2009) CD-83695

