

HIROMI CHRONICLES HER WORLD TRAVELS ON HER FIRST SOLO PIANO RECORDING

A Place To Be set for release on September 2, 2009, in Japan;
January 26, 2010, in the U.S.

If all the world is indeed a stage, pianist-composer Hiromi Uehara has played on just about every corner of it. Since the beginning of the decade, she has supported her impressive body of studio work with an ambitious tour schedule that has electrified audiences throughout the U.S., Europe, Asia and elsewhere with performances that have pushed the limits of piano jazz to new frontiers of compositional and technical skills.

Each stop on her journey – be it the world-class metropolis, the quiet college town or something in between – has introduced her to a new and singular vibe that has left an indelible impression on her creative sensibilities. Indeed, she has come away from every new place with just as much as she has brought to it, and perhaps even more.

Hiromi chronicles just a few of the many places and moments where she has experienced the almost mystical exchange between performer and audience on *A Place To Be*, her new CD on Telarc International, a division of Concord Music Group. The album, her first solo piano recording, is set for release on September 2, 2009, in Japan, and January 26, 2010, in the U.S.

“I really wanted the record to be a kind of travel journal,” she says. “I’ve traveled so much in the last few years that I’ve started to wonder exactly where is the place that I’m supposed to be. Traveling takes so much out of you. It can be exhausting. But as soon as I go on the stage and I see people who are very happy because of what I’m doing, it just erases all of the struggles and the craziness that can come with all the traveling, and it really fulfills me.”

To Hiromi’s way of thinking, music is something much more than just notes on a scale or a series of black and white keys. Rather, it is a naturally occurring phenomenon to be plucked out of the air, a vibration to be captured and re-transmitted to receptive ears and open hearts. “Some places have such a special vibe,” she says. “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.”

Several of those beautiful places and moments are captured on *A Place To Be*. The set gets under way with the frenetic energy of “BQE,” an abbreviation for the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway. The song captures the intensity of what Hiromi describes in her liner notes as the expressway’s “crazy traffic” and “mad fast cars,” but she adds that the attentive motorist can still catch the essence of Manhattan, “a place where reality and dreams exist together.”

“Sicilian Blue” opens with a tug-of-war between fast and slow tempos, then segues into something much more melodic and intriguing. Hiromi recalls the visit to the Mediterranean island that inspired the piece: “When I was walking down the street in Sicily, this melody came to me very naturally, probably because of such a blue sky, blue ocean and beautiful streets.”

The spirited “Bern Baby Bern” is the pianist’s nod to Marian’s Jazzroom, a popular club in Bern, Switzerland, and one of her favorite nightspots when her travels take her to that part of

Europe. “There is a small jingle they play when they start the show, and the song is called ‘Bern Baby Bern.’ This is my version of the song, expressing how happy and excited I am to be there.”

She recalls her years as a student at the Berklee College of Music in Boston in “Cape Cod Chips,” a jazzy, freewheeling piece that captures the energy of an up-and-coming musician in her formative years. “I have so many memories of jamming and talking about music with friends all through the night, having Cape Cod Potato Chips on the side,” says Hiromi.

Her take on the well known “Pachelbel’s Canon” employs a muted harpsichord, and gradually shifts toward something far more syncopated and playful than was ever intended for the original baroque-era piece. The track came about after Hiromi fulfilled a longstanding dream to walk the streets of Germany while listening to the original composition from the late 1600s. “It came true,” she says, “and it was one of those moments so hard to describe into words.”

The three-part “Viva Vegas” suite opens with the boisterous “Show City, Show Girl,” followed by the much more pensive “Daytime in Vegas” and finally “The Gambler,” a high-speed coda that opens at the uppermost end of the keyboard and quickly makes us of everything below it. “One day,” says Hiromi, “I’m hoping to go to Las Vegas to perform this song.”

The melodic title track closes the set with questions for both the musician and the listener. “Everyone is looking for a place to be,” says Hiromi. “Where is mine? Where is yours? I believe life’s like a big journey to find the place to be.”

In addition to being a musical travelogue, *A Place To Be* also represents a personal milestone for Hiromi, who recorded the album just days before her thirtieth birthday in March 2009. “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.

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