

Art Hirahara's new album: a spiritual journey to Japan

« Previous / Next »

By admin / February 10, 2015 / Japanese Culture / No Comments

After having moved from San Francisco Bay Area to New York in 2003, jazz pianist and composer Art Hirahara challenged the city's prominent jazz scene, and its pool of world-class musicians by performing at historic venues such as Smalls, Birdland, Jazz Standard and 55 bar. He has been privileged to work alongside Stacey Kent, Freddy Cole and Akira Tana to name a few. It was a matter of time that the musician would immerse his talent and conquer the jazz world, where his success and talent has been lavishly recognized for an on-going decade.



Art-Hirahara-Libations-And-Meditations

His recent album release *Libations and Meditations* (Jan. 6th) features eleven pieces of storytelling that journeyed into musical notes shortly after his father's death. It was during this time that Art became involved in yoga, which eventually transcended into his music. He was able to harness the relaxation and mediation through the practice, and portray that inspiration into the new album title, 'meditations', and incorporate that into all the tracks within. Yoga has not only expanded his perspective of musical space, but also allowed him to find comfort in taking time and developing a larger sense of density or emptiness. "Dead Man Posed" is a musical representation of his yoga exploration that adroitly expresses the feelings of suspension and

resolution that one tends to experience at the end of every yoga practice in Savasana ("corpse pose").

"With Two Ice Cubes", although written on a last minute whim of inspiration, is everything if not a savor of fulfillment. It reflects on the 'libations' of the album title, where it thoughtfully focuses on the musician's liquor enthusiasm on fine cocktails and whiskey. Recently, the artist has been traveling frequently to Japan, exposing himself to an extensive selection of Japanese whiskeys (Nikka is his favorite). Aside from that being benignly lenient, the meaning of the album title also seeks a deeper sentiment that correlates to pouring an offering to elders, deity or those who have passed. For Art, this album has become an offering to his father who passed away recently, as well as a stretch in time for his ancestors who were in Hiroshima and Saga.

In perspective of Art's Japanese heritage, his cultural upbringing shaped his musical perspective, where as a child, he attended various festivals such as Nikkei Matsuri and San Jose Taiko. During this time, he acquainted himself to the art of Japanese Folk, and its powerful traditional folk drumming. His first taste of



rhythm was evoked at that time, which cultivated his passion for jazz and swing. His new album includes a constructive jazz piece titled "Karatachi No Hana (K. Yamada)", a Japanese song originally introduced by his mother. This piece tends to differentiate from the rest of the track list because it journeys into his heritage and reconnects with that part of his past. The course of development for this traditional Japanese piece was specifically produced for the 50th Anniversary of the Northern California chapter of Ikenobo Ikebana (a Buddhist floral offering, referring to the name of the buildings associated with the Shiunzan Chohojo or Rokkakudo Temple in Kyoto, as well as the name of the members who served generations as head priests of the temple). His aunt was president of the chapter, and requested that he perform traditional Japanese pieces with an American jazz perspective.



Other notable pieces on the album include one titled "D.A.Y", which represents the initials of his previous trio, Dan Aran and Yoshi Waki. It also stands as the in-between of his past and new record albums. "Only Child" was a track written by the great pianist, Bill Evans who has heavily influenced Art with his concept of interplay between members in the piano trio setting, deeply shaping Art's approach to playing and writing.

The artist has taken his carefully anticipated musical stories to countries like Europe, Asia, South America, the Middle East and the United States. He has also exposed himself to handfults of experience to challenge his musicality by teaching at the Brooklyn-Queens Conservatory, being the Musical Director of an Off-Broadway show, and experimenting with world music like West African drumming and dance. *Libations and Meditations* has compiled all these musical experiences achieved by Art, and gathered them into a piano bebop bliss one song after another.

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