



HIROMI

PROGRAM

There will not be an intermission.

Saturday, October 12 @ 8 PM

Zellerbach Theatre

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Hiromi

"I don't want to put a name on my music. 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 need to give it a name." - Hiromi

Japan has produced an impressive assemblage of jazz pianists, from Toshiko Akiyoshi and Makoto Ozone. And now, well into the change of the 21st century, the pianist/composer Hiromi is the latest in that line of amazing musicians. Ever since the 2003 release of her debut Telarc CD, *Another Mind*, Hiromi has electrified audiences and critics east and west, with a creative energy that encompasses and eclipses the boundaries of jazz, classical, and pop parameters, taking improvisation and composition to new heights of complexity and sophistication. Her latest CD, *Live in Montreal*, finds her veering off in yet another new direction, exploring a unique sonic palette in collaboration with the Columbian harp virtuoso Edmar Castaneda (Paquito D'Rivera, Wynton Marsalis).

Born in Hamamatsu, Shizuoka, Japan on March 26, 1979, Hiromi's piano lessons started when she was six. Her first teacher, Noriku Hikida, encouraged her to access both the intuitive and technical aspects of music. "Her energy was always so high, and she was so emotional," Hiromi says of Hikida. "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." Hikida also exposed Hiromi to jazz and introduced her to the great pianists Erroll Garner and Oscar Peterson. She enrolled in the Yamaha School of music at age six and started to write music at that time.

Hiromi moved to the United States in 1999, and she matriculated at the Berklee College of Music in Boston, which extended her artistic sensibilities. "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 there are so many great ones. 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 the jazz veteran bassist/arranger Richard Evans, who teaches arranging and orchestration. It was Evans who took Hiromi's demo tape to his friend and collaborator, the legendary pianist/bandleader Ahmad Jamal. "[Professor Evans] really liked how I played," Hiromi fondly recalled. "And Ahmad loved the demo- I couldn't believe it! He's been very encouraging and supportive. He's an amazing human being."

Evans co-produced her debut CD, *Another Mind*, with 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." *Another Mind* was a critical success in North America and in 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. Hiromi's astonishing debut was but a forecast of the shape of jazz to come.

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 Reader's 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's* Readers Poll for her 2006 release, *Spiral*. Hiromi's winning streak continued with the release of *Time Control* in 2007 and *Beyond Standard* in 2008. Both releases featured Sonicbloom, her hand-picked group that included guitarist Dave "Fuze" Fiuczynski, bassist Tony Grey and drummer Martin Valihora.

Hiromi achieved a number of milestones in 2009. She recorded with pianist Chick Corea, who she met in Japan when she was 17, on *Duet*, a two-disc live recording of their transcendent, transgenerational

and transcultural duo concert in Tokyo. She also appeared on bassist Stanley Clarke's Heads up International Release, *Jazz in the Garden*, which also featured former Chick Corea bandmate, drummer Lenny White.

In June of that same year, Hiromi 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's incendiary fretwork.

In 2010, Hiromi released *Place to Be*, an impressive and intimate solo piano CD; her evocative aural travelogue of the many places and spaces she visited around the world. "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."

She followed up *Place to Be* with a DVD, *Hiromi Solo Live at Blue Note New York*. Recorded on August 20 and 21, 2010, at the Blue Note in New York City, the video includes 11 originals and a special bonus feature with interview clips and performance footage from some of Hiromi's favorite cities around the world.

On her 2011 album, *Voice*, Hiromi's goal was to capture people's "inner voices" to create what she called a "three-dimensional sound." On that album, she assembled a trio that included herself and two veteran players: contrabass guitarist Anthony Jackson and drummer Simon Phillips. While Hiromi had played with Jackson prior to recording *Voice*, she had never recorded an entire album with either him or Phillips, the latter who had been recommended to her by legendary bassist Stanley Clarke, a mutual acquaintance.

Also in 2011, *The Stanley Clarke Band* CD, featuring Hiromi, won the Grammy® Award for Best Contemporary Jazz Album.

While on the road, Hiromi started writing music for the follow-up CD, *Move*, released in 2013. "Because I had been playing with Anthony and Simon for quite a bit, I just started to understand their characteristics, and I could find a hidden gem in their playing," she explains. "There's so much more to their playing. As a composer, I really wanted to write the songs especially for them, and I wanted to extract the unique beauty of their playing. *Move*, like *Voice*, had an overriding theme, which Hiromi describes as "time in one day". "You wake up and go to work and then hang out," she says. "The album is like a soundtrack for a day." That same year, she had several impressive placements in *DownBeat* magazine's 61st Annual International Critics Poll, in the Jazz Artist, Piano, Keyboard and Rising Star: Piano categories. In 2013, she performed at George Wein's Newport Jazz Festival and again performed there for the festival's sixtieth anniversary in 2014.

Alive, released in 2014, heralded the return of The Trio Project, featuring Phillips' powerful, yet poetic percussion and Jackson's flowing, glow-in-the-dark basslines beautifully buoying and supporting Hiromi's ingenious and impassioned improvisations. Her evocative and expansive compositions evoke the myriad moods and mysteries of life and reveal the soulful, syncopated simpatico of her thrilling threesome. Her tenth CD, *Spark*, also featured the trio, this time igniting her most narratively sweeping and emotionally overflowing set of music to date. No wonder *DownBeat* magazine proclaimed the terrific triad as "one of the most exciting groups working in any genre today."

In 2017, *Live in Montreal* found her veering off in yet another new direction, exploring a wholly unique sonic palette in collaboration with the Colombian harp virtuoso Edmar Castaneda (Paquito D'Rivera, Wynton Marsalis).

Spectrum is the latest chapter in Hiromi's ever-evolving musical life. "I'm hungry to learn," she told *DownBeat* magazine, "so I'll always keep my big ears open fully, ready to learn every single minute that I play."