



Yamiyo Ni Karasu
Satoko Fujii Tobira (Libra)
Uminari
KAZE (Libra)
Ichigo Ichie
Satoko Fujii Orchestra Berlin (Libra)
 by Robert Iannapollo

Pianist/composer/bandleader Satoko Fujii is a true citizen of the world. Born in Japan, she lives both in Tokyo and Berlin. She studied in the U.S. at Berklee and New England Conservatory (one of her teachers was Paul Bley). She tours the U.S. and Europe frequently and has multiple bands on all three continents. And she has consistently released multiple quality recordings every year since 1997. One would be tempted to call her the hardest working person in show business but there's nothing show biz about her. She's a creative musician working at the peak of her powers.

Yamiyo Ni Karasu debuts a new quartet, which was an outgrowth of Fujii's trio with bassist Todd Nicholson and drummer Takashi Itani. Trumpeter Natsuki Tamura (Fujii's husband) sat in with the band and it seemed so natural an addition that a new group was born she named Tobira. Tamura's characteristic extended range in the opening unaccompanied phrases of "Hanabi" herald his arrival into the group. After a two-minute intro, the group enters and they're off on a multi-part 14-minute epic with asides and interludes making full use of the quartet. The program plays almost like a suite. The free burst of "Fuki" segues

nically into an almost impressionistic solo sequence by Fujii as an intro to "Wind Dance", a piece with a rhythm in 7. And the misterioso concluding title track ends the album on an inconclusive note, perhaps indicating more to come?

Uminari is the third album by Fujii's Franco/Japanese quartet KAZE. It's a very different quartet: a two-trumpet frontline (Tamura and Christian Pruvost), Fujii and drummer Peter Orins. Tamura and Pruvost share an affinity for Bill Dixon's approach to their instrument's extremities; it's best heard on Tamura's composition "Inspiration", a 20-minute sound exploration with Fujii inside the piano and Orins scraping and bowing his cymbals while Tamura and Pruvost wrench the most alien of sounds from their horns. "Vents Contraires", written by Pruvost, starts out sounding like pure electronics before Fujii enters with somber chords, pushing the music in another direction. But all is not mere abstraction. Fujii's "Running Around" is the most playful track, opening with a puckish theme stated by both horns before the rhythm section enters, accompanying each soloist with staggered stop/start intervals, which throw the piece off-kilter. The pieces are lengthy (all over 10 minutes) and are explored leisurely and with the determination to create a unique soundscape.

Ichigo Ichie is the debut recording by Fujii's Orchestra Berlin. It is her fifth active big band! The title track is a four-part piece focusing more on sectional work than solos, per se. Not that there aren't individual impressive solos: Paulina Owczarek's baritone solo on "ABCD" is galvanic and causes the listener to sit up and take notice. The reed section with Gebhard Ullmann and Matthias Schubert is particularly strong. The brass, led by Tamura, is called upon to deliver some exceedingly difficult passages. The drumming team of Michael Greiner and Orins pushes things along powerfully, recalling the double drum teamwork on some of the Globe Unity Orchestra's recordings. While there is plenty to recommend this recording, with a couple more sessions, this could become one of the most vibrant big bands in Europe.

For more information, visit librarecords.com. *Tobira* is at Ibeam Brooklyn Nov. 17th. See Calendar.



Aria
Sullivan Fortner (Impulse!)
Original Vision
Aidan Carroll (Truth Revolution)
 by David R. Adler

If there's one thing besides his superb piano artistry that New Orleans native Sullivan Fortner captures on his debut release *Aria*, it's his deep rapport with bassist Aidan Carroll and drummer Joe Dyson, Jr. The role of tenor and soprano saxophonist Tivon Pennicott is also central, though three numbers omit the horn and one is solo piano ("For All We Know", a yearning, intricately voice-led odyssey). In the trio pieces—Fred Rodgers' "You Are Special", Jerome Kern's "All the Things You Are" and Duke Jordan's "You Know I Care"—Fortner reveals a mastery of tradition with Carroll and Dyson while striving for a personal language, rhythmically adventurous and harmonically astute.

The Fortner-Carroll-Dyson trinity appears again on Carroll's debut, *Original Vision*, though just on four tracks (three with tenor saxophonist John Ellis). The vibe is quasi-electric; Carroll plays upright but is credited on keyboards, electric bass, voice and percussion as well. The unaccompanied solo track

"Intro: Reflections" shows what he can do with all of it. Fortner plays piano and Rhodes, even Hammond B-3 organ on the moody, melodic neo-soul highlight "Sundays", sung beautifully by Chris Turner. Carroll's writing is ambitious and eclectic. There's as much creativity in his reinvention of Billy Strayhorn's "Day Dream", the one non-original, a bass-piano duet with Fortner. "Shamanistic" is pulsing acoustic jazz with the subtlest sheen of keyboards (likely Carroll's) creeping in toward the end. "For Now" begins deceptively with involved hits and a synth-laced melody (Carroll again) but then shifts to the deepest-grooving midtempo swing and stays there. "Sull's Song" is restrained and almost folk-rockish; Fortner tailors his playing to the song but bursts forth with flourishes in just the right spots.

Fortner's writing, like Carroll's, is strong and forward-thinking: 5 of the 10 compositions on *Aria* are his own, beginning with the jumpy and involved title track, an effective soprano showcase for Pennicott. The soprano returns on "Passepied", a relaxed, flowing odd-meter invention with a Latin tinge and a reference to "Woody'n You" changes. "Ballade" has an accessible, lyrical feel and a striking deceptive cadence at the end while "Parade" stirs the waters with angular, swinging counterpoint and "Finale" closes on a brisk Chick Corea-esque note, with Pennicott in fine tenor form. There's also a daring adaptation of Monk's "I Mean You", with excellent Pennicott again and an adroit quote of "Four In One" from Fortner. It's chops and creativity on that level that distinguishes Fortner as one of our finest young pianists.

For more information, visit impulse-label.com and truthrevolutionrecords.com. Fortner's quartet with Carroll is at Jazz Standard Nov. 18th. See Calendar.



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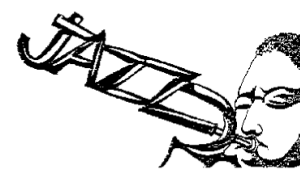
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