Masayoshi Fujita – Book Of Life (2018)

1 Snowy Night Tale 5:34 2 Fog 4:25 3 It's Magical 4:24 4 Old Automation 5:54 5 Book Of Life 4:35 6 Harp 6:26 7 Mountain Deer 4:32 8 Sadness 4:42 9 Misty Avalanche 4:03 10 Cloud Of Light 5:09

Masayoshi Fujita is something of an advocate for the vibraphone. As an instrument it's often relegated to the background, a musical device that serves as a way of adding extra depth to an ensemble, but rarely stepping into the limelight. Over the course of two albums, Stories and Apologues, Fujita has brought the vibraphone to centre-stage, composing beautiful, melodious pieces that showcase the full potential of the instrument. Book of Life, Fujita's third album of vibraphone compositions continues this trend, with a collection of richly textured, yet intimate songs.

Whilst composed entirely by Fujita, Book of Life at times feels much more like an ensemble work than any of his previous albums, with songs bringing in far more instruments than before. A duo of cellos set a galloping rhythm to lead single 'It's Magical', whilst a growing choir of voices sets a cold, foreboding tone on 'Misty Avalanche'. Whilst Fujita has worked with other instruments in the past - Stories for instance featured cello and violin - this was often limited to just a few tracks, with the focus squarely on the the vibraphone. Here Fujita's vibraphone, whilst still the star, sometimes takes more of a backseat to the other players - the result feeling more like a collaboration between experienced players than a group backing a single figure.

Whilst Book of Life expands the palette of Fujita's compositions, he still manages to find ways to experiment with the vibraphone to create new sounds and textures. On 'Fog' Fujita plays the vibraphone with a cello bow, to produce these soft sustained notes that give the track a mournful, lonely tone, whilst a second vibraphone plays a slow melody. The album's title track, meanwhile, sees Fujita scratching the bar of the vibraphone which combines with chimes to

create this tension between the abrasive and the delicate.

In many ways this is Fujita's most consistent record, both musically and thematically. The expanded ensemble allowing Fujita to create these beautiful, layered pieces that seem seem to flow effortlessly from one to the next. Ultimately, Book of Life feels like a confident step forward for Fujita. It opens up his compositions to new sounds without sacrificing the core of what made his earlier records such an intriguing listen. ---Robert Whitfield, thefourohfive.com

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