

Hiroshima - Departure (2012)

Written by bluesever

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01 – Have You Ever Wondered 02 – Koto Cruise 03 – Blues for Senda 04 – Smiling Jack 05 – See You Again (Ja Mata Ne Moody) 06 – Yamasong Duet 07 – First Nation 08 – Thousand Cranes (2011) 09 – One Wish (Trio Version) Personnel: Dan Kuramoto: saxophones, flutes, synths, shakuhachi, flute, percussion; June Kuramoto: koto; Kimo Cornwell: piano, keyboards, synths; Danny Yamamoto: drums, percussion; Dean Cortez: bass; Shoji Kameda: taiko, percussion, throat singing; Tetsuya "Tex" Nakamura: harmonica (1).

Departure isn't as much a radical departure as it is the next step in Hiroshima's evolution away from smooth jazz mainstay into a tight unit of skilled players making consistently solid music. The band is still built around multi-instrumentalist Dan Kuramoto and June Kuramoto's kinetic koto performances. James "Kimo" Cornwell's keyboard is an underrated strength, as is bassist Dean Cortez, and Danny Yamamoto and Shoji Kameda, on drums and taiko respectively.

Hiroshima's previous album, *Legacy* (Heads Up, 2009) was a celebration of the band's 30 years in the recording industry, but three years later *Departure* marks the group going the independent route on its first release on its own label. Even after four million records sold, Hiroshima finds itself in a similar position as other veteran artists, looking for new ways to thrive as major record companies shed jazz music from their catalogs.

The Hiroshima approach to integrating Eastern textures to Western music still flourishes, with the opening "Have You Ever Wondered" featuring Tetsuya "Tex" Nakamura's soulful harmonica solo, while June Kuramoto's koto gets a workout on the following "Koto Cruise." Cornwell's piano and Dan Kuramoto's flute percolate on "Blues For Sendai," a tribute of hope for the hard-hit city at the epicenter of the devastating 2011 earthquake.

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There are two tributes on Departure: "Smiling Jack" is for Dan Kuramoto's father, while "See You Again" goes out to saxophonist James Moody, whom the band recognizes as a mentor with "the biggest smile on earth"; the heartfelt sentiments to the departed souls is earnest and undeniable. "Yamasong Duet" is a percussion duel between Yamamoto and Kameda, with some unique throat singing from Kameda.

However, it is time for Hiroshima to stop dabbling with different interpretations of two of their most popular songs, "A Thousand Cranes" and "One Wish," the latter stripped down to a trio with the Kuramotos and Cornwell. While okay on their own merits, these reworks can't touch the originals previously revisited on Legacy three years ago.

At its heart, Departure is an on the money if not groundbreaking entry in the Hiroshima catalog for longtime fans and a good jumping on spot for new ones. ---Jeff Winbush, allaboutjazz.com

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