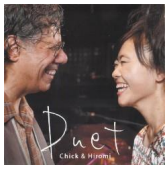
Chick & Hiromi – Duet (2008)



1-1 Very Early 9:13 1-2 How Insensitive 7:37 1-3 Déja Vu 9:01 1-4 Fool On The Hill 6:46 1-5 Humpty Dumpty 7:50 1-6 Bolivar Blues 8:45 2-1 Windows 7:45 2-2 Old Castle 14:56 2-3 Summertime 8:50 2-4 Place To Be 8:12 2-5 Do Mo -Children's Song #12 13:02 2-6 Concierto De Aranjuez/Spain 12:11 Chick Corea, Hiromi Uehara – piano (Yamaha)

When Chick Corea invited a then 17-year-old pianist, Hiromi Uehara, to improvise alongside him at the 1996 Tokyo Jazz Festival, it said as much about her already prodigious talent as it did about her confidence. Hiromi has, of course, since earned a world-wide reputation as an exhilarating improviser and performer. Corea, a veteran of over a hundred recordings, has been enjoying a wave of critical acclaim in recent times, almost without precedent in his long and stellar career. So the stage was nicely set when the two reconvened eleven years after their first meeting in the more intimate surroundings of the Blue Note Jazz Club, Tokyo to record the music contained on this double CD.

Two piano virtuosos unleashed simultaneously can be sonically challenging, but thankfully, the duo avoids falling into the trap of trying to compete with each other, and refrains from displaying all their wares at once. Instead, we are treated to graceful, lyrical, and occasionally boisterous interpretations of a familiar set of tunes.

The set list, whilst not overly adventurous, is nicely harmonious; Bill Evans' "Very Early" segues beautifully into the Jobim/De Moraes favorite "How Insensitive," which is in turn followed by the Hiromi's "Déjà Vu." Lyricism runs through these three compositions like a current, forming a kind of triad; that Hiromi's composition fits so snugly reminds us that she is not only a great pianist, but a notable composer.

The flow of ideas back on forth transmitted through the two Yamaha pianos is never less than engaging. Virtuosity is a given, but what impresses is how closely the two pianists listen to each other, finishing each other's lines, playing harmonious improvised unison lines, or playing sympathetic counterpoint. There are plenty of dazzling runs too, not least on the fifteen-minute workout "Old Castle by the river, in the middle of a forest."

A lively, somewhat grand interpretation of Lennon and McCartney's "Fool on the Hill" is followed by a funky take on Thelonious Monk's "Bolivar Blues," which features some very nimble give-and-take improvisation and points up the singularity of Monk as a composer in any era. An energetic rendition of a barely recognizable "Summertime" is a vehicle for extended soloing; the remainder of the tunes are originals.

Almost inevitably the set closes with Corea's calling card "Spain," with the familiar intro of Joaquin Rodrigo's 1939 masterpiece of modern classical music, "Concierto de Aranjuez." It is however, Corea's other compositions which stand out. The lovely "Windows" is an album highlight, and the dissonance of "Humpty Dumpty" and "Do Mo" provide tension, contrasting nicely with the stylistic uniformity of the rest of the tunes—the former with a cartoon-caper energy, the flurry of swirling, crashing notes and fractured rhythms sound as though the fabled king's men are jumping up and down on poor Humpty.

This is serious yet joyous music which demands and repays close listening. In time, Duet will take its place in the pantheon of historically significant recordings. In the meantime, just enjoy.
---Ian Patterson, allaboutjazz.com

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