

Hiromi Uehara – Spark (2016)

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1. *Spark* 2. *In a Trance* 3. *Take Me Away* 4. *Wonderland* 5. *Indulgence* 6. *Dilemma* 7. *What Will Be, Will Be* 8. *Wake Up and Dream* 9. *All's Well* Hiromi Uehara - piano, keyboards Anthony Jackson - bass guitar Simon Phillips – drums

I have been following Hiromi's career for quite a while – I have always been in awe not only of her unique approach to jazz piano but also her fiery performances either as a bandleader or a side player with Stanley Clarke, which I was fortunate enough to hear not once but twice – at the Blue Note (with Lenny White on drums) and later that year at Central Park Summerstage.

When playing live, she becomes almost one with the music, using her entire body to deliver the music. She has incredible speed and her tunes mix more traditional contemporary jazz with electronic elements. When performing with her band, the sound is incredibly tight, and their chemistry is palpable.

On *Spark* (Telarc/Concord), Hiromi reunites with the trio project from 2010's "*Move*" (Telarc/Concord), which is rounded out by Anthony Jackson (electric bass) and Simon Phillips (drums). The disc opens with the title track, a nine-minute tour-de-force that begins with a mellow, classically inflected piano solo that evolves into a progressive piece in which the bandleader exercises her creativity with a solid backbeat from the rhythm section.

"In a Trance" is a fast-paced in which Phillips doubles the entire piano's notes with the drums – everything is played with incredible speed that it takes a few hearings to fully grasp everything, but just as you adjust the song changes pace into a Brazilian-like, laid-back feel before it goes back to the original melody. Things don't quite slow down until "Wake Up and Dream," a

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mellifluous solo piano ballad reminiscent of 2009's "Place to Be," her only solo piano album to date. "Spark" closes with "All's Well," a straight-ahead, bluesy tune that allows the band to stretch and showcase a more playful side.

With "Spark," Hiromi has not veered from her path of musical exploration, and the tunes have welcome twists that surprise even fans familiar with her previous works. --- Ernest Barteldes, musicwhatever.wordpress.com

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