

For years, I have been following the activities of the Japanese pianist, composer, arranger and music producer Takeshi Asai who had settled in New York. Among his numerous undertakings, including piano duo, classical jazz trio, solo piano convention, and electronic music, the formula of the trio has always been closest to me. That is why it was with great joy that I received the news that this excellent musician recorded his sixth album in December 2021, on which his piano is framed with double bass and percussion parts.

This time, Takeshi Asai's musical partners are: San Francisco-based bassist Bob Gingery, and New York drummer Brian Woodruff. Both musicians also run their own formations, have many original projects, constellations with the participation of many respected American jazzmen, and albums bearing their own names. Thanks to a series of joint concerts at the B Flat club in Lower Manhattan, a trio was formed, which turned out to be a formation for each of the musicians, within which they can freely and naturally express both their artistry and release the improvisational rule inherent in every jazz artist.

After the albums "New York Trio, Vol.1" (2012, with Daniel Ori and Rob Garcia), and "French Trio, Vol.1-4" (2013-2017, with Pascal Combeau and Maxime Legrand), another album by Takeshi Asai he consistently titled simply "Trio Vol.VI".

Recorded during four sessions in the pianist's own studio in July and December 2021, the album contains nine premiere compositions by the artist, and a neatly closing instrumental arrangement of James Taylor's song from 1969: "Fire and Rain".

In his music, Asai refers to the fascination with both classical music, dedicating themes to J.S. Bach ("Air on the White Keys") and F.Schubert ("Ave Marta"), great jazz masters: Wayne Shorter ("C / Db") and John Coltrane ("Blue Brain"), as in the painting of Pablo Picasso ("Mes Demoiselles"). Musical dedications revealing the source of inspiration of the pianist-composer with which the songs on subsequent albums are described, are a constant element in the work of Takeshi Asai. They often concern not only well-known figures, but also people, places and important events in the artist's life. Thus, the recipient is always aware of being in contact with music created from the natural need of the artist, revealing his feelings and sensitivity.

This is also the case with "Trio Vol.VI", an album which not only offers the highest quality 53-minute portion of contemporary, though stylistically deeply rooted in the tradition of jazz, but is also an engaging auditory journey through the fascination and enchantment of this exceptional artist.

The dynamic opening of the album is "WI" (relating to the state of Wisconsin), in which, apart from the dignified-sounding piano of the leader, we can admire the spontaneous percussion creations.

In the lyrical "Yonder", adorned with a brilliant double bass solo, we can find both Chopin's romanticism and sonic elusiveness, as well as jazz walking.

On the other hand, elegant and dignified, and at the same time sophisticated "(I didn't know that it was) Bacon" is a true display of Takeshi Asai's pianistic invention and another opportunity to listen to the syncopating playing of Brian Woodruff.

The impressive ballad "Iota" is a new incarnation of the composition we have already known in the version for piano solo (album "Live in New York Vol.2", 2018). Here, thanks to the excellent setting of the bass and drums, we get to know its completely new, oriental face showing themes.

Although "Air on the White Keys" unequivocally refers to one of the most famous pieces, not only by J.S. Bach, but also classical music in general, there are few direct quotes here. It is rather a motif paying tribute to the aesthetics of this unique miniature of the German Master, constituting an independent composition.

It is different in the case of "Ave Marta", where Takeshi Asai made a kind of recomposition of Franz Schubert's famous miniature "Ave Maria", transforming its main motif, which then served him as a starting point for extensive improvisations.

The illustrative "Mes Demoiselles" is exceptionally stimulating to the imagination, equipped with an expressive, memorable melodic theme, and a clear taste of classical jazz is brought by the extensive, contemplative ballad "Blue Brain".

The faster-paced "C / Db" is similarly reminiscent of the atmosphere of a New York jazz club, while James Taylor, placed at the end of the album "Fire and Rain", leaves the listener in a cheerful, sunny mood.

"Trio Vol.VI" is an excellent album full of fresh ideas. It is also an album that Takeshi Asai once again proves its individuality and inventiveness in the formula of a piano trio.

I sincerely hope that the Japanese musician who has settled in New York for years, about whom more and more is being talked and written about recently, will become a permanent fixture in the minds of European jazz lovers as an artist who has a lot to offer.

The album was released on April 14, 2022.