

Takeshi Asai never ceases to amaze. His composing, his performance, and his interaction with other artists are forever on an upward trajectory. His ability to touch and to move the listener deepens with every album. No matter the format—duo, trio or ensemble—Takeshi makes himself at home with his musical surroundings and his fellow artists become, at least for that musical moment, as dear as family.

It doesn't stop there with Takeshi. Not at all. He has an astonishing capacity to envelop and enrapture an audience so that they, too, become part of the experience and add their own chemistry to that of the artists.

So it is with the magic of Takeshi's captured live performances and this album is an extraordinary example of that most endearing and captivating of Jazz environments, the live trio.

It is the third recording of the wonderful French Trio of Takeshi on piano, Pascal Combeau on bass, and Maxime Legrand on drums.

When asked why the July 12 concert was chosen among the seven summer French concerts of the Trio, Takeshi answered, "This concert was particularly great because of the energy and the spirit, and the communication between the trio and the audience that we had on that night. It was the night that I felt so fortunate to play with such great musicians and friends, Maxime Legrand and Pascal Combeau."

But not only the artists and the audience, the depth and power, the emotion and the life, indeed the love within the compositions themselves, contribute to the profundity of the exquisite experience.

The concert that night opened with *Moonlit Night*. It was a composition that Takeshi had played on 2016's Takeshi Asai Solo: Live in New York. It is a lovely nocturne that was touching as a solo piano piece but receives a deeper coloring with the touches of Combeau and Legrand. Written in 1999, while Takeshi was at Berklee School of Music, he wanted to render the "magical power that the moon has on us."

*Eb+* was written in April of 2016. The title is the musical designation of the E-flat augmented chord. With its advanced rhythmic and harmonic features, it still has the power to charm and to touch. The point of the song, according to Takeshi, was "to reduce the literature aspect in the song," leaving it as "pure music, which leaves for the imagination of the audience." The simplicity of the approach creates a heart-warming aspect that is not lost on the artists who render it emotionally and with their own warmth.

Combeau adds a vibrato to his bass that reaches right inside the heart and squeezes.

*Tell Me There'll Be Better Days* is a Pascal Combeau piece written for his son. It opens with a melancholic Latin approach that Takeshi says is suitable for the bandoneon "which is very French." The movement of the piece is energetic, audible through the solos and trio. Even in the restrained moments, a life pulses throughout the performance. Accompanying that life, as always, is a hope.

*ABC* was inspired by Imogen Heap's *Speeding Cars*. "It's in the ABC of growing up." The piece originally was written for the New York Trio in 2012. Takeshi knew that it would fit well with the French Trio and, so, has recorded it a second time to great effect.

It is slow and reflective, giving time to pause and consider. Combeau and Legrand pick up precisely on what Takeshi hopes to accomplish in the piece, adding their own stories and experiences to Takeshi's narrative. It becomes a concurrent but thrice-told tale of learning and wonder.

Takeshi wrote *When You Feel Sad* before leaving for the French tour. Simply put, this is the song to cheer you when you feel sad. Takeshi describes it with "the melody is easy and the harmony is easy, but the rhythm is not. It features an odd meter 3+3+2." That little complexity is enough to bring a smile to your face. The effect of the simple melody against the odd time is captivating.

When asked why he chose the Miles Davis piece *Nardis*, Takeshi replied with "It was my favorite piece when I was a beginning jazz student. It was like a meeting your old girlfriend after 20 years of separation. It's my hunch that it was co-written by Bill Evans and, as a life-long pupil of Bill Evans, playing this song in France gave me great pleasure."

Another song written just before his latest French sojourn was *Very Little Waltz*. The melody and the changes "came together as a package in a lightning bolt." As such, Takeshi never edited the piece. Truth be told, *Very Little Waltz* is a prequel to *(Not So) Little Waltz* from *New York Trio, Vol. 1*.

*Macka* is Takeshi's turn at writing something "stupid and funny and blunt." Even after the great performances of Combeau and Legrand, Takeshi stills feels he achieved his aim. For the audience, nothing could be further from the truth.

*French Trio Vols. 1 and 2* were heralds that prepared us for the coming of something magnificent. *French Trio, Vol. 3* is the crowning achievement.