

30 YEARS IN THE MAKING - HIROSHIMA CELEBRATES THE FIRST DECADE OF THEIR *LEGACY*

New recording reinterprets compositions from the early years

When Hiroshima cut their self-titled debut album in 1979, record executives at their own label placed bets that the band's unprecedented amalgam of traditional Japanese instruments, American jazz structure and Latin percussion – an intriguing but ultimately refreshing anomaly in the waning days of the disco era – wouldn't make much of an impact in terms of sales or critical acclaim.

Thirty years later, Hiroshima has remained very much in the game. And they've done so by sticking to that original philosophy of blending genres to map out and promote unlikely artistic and cultural connections. After three decades, in a time when the globe grows smaller and more connected by the day, and sounds from all over that globe can be found in almost any piece of contemporary music, it appears that the world may finally be catching up with Hiroshima.

The band offers a retrospective of those early years with the August 18, 2009, release of *Legacy* (HUCD 3153) on Heads Up International, a division of Concord Music Group. The album features eleven songs from the first ten years of Hiroshima's prolific history – each re-recorded by the band's current six-member lineup with assistance from four guest artists.

At the heart of *Legacy* – and of the Hiroshima experience in general – is the convergence of Eastern and Western music, as forged by saxophonist Dan Kuramoto and koto player June Kuramoto, the founding members whose joint commitment to genre bending and cross-cultural innovation is as solid today as it was on that first recording.

“When you start looking back at fifteen records over thirty years, that's a lot of material to choose from,” says Dan Kuramoto. “So we narrowed the scope to the first ten years, which includes five records – two of which were gold. We tracked everything live in my home studio for this new recording, with almost no overdubs. In many cases, the songs on this record are fairly similar to the originals. In some cases, they're very different.”

Rounding out the current Hiroshima lineup on *Legacy* are keyboardist Kimo Cornwell, bassist Dean Cortez, drummer Danny Yamamoto and taiko/percussionist Shoji Kameda. Guest artists – whom Kuramoto refers to as the band's “extended family” – include percussionist Richie Gajate Garcia and vocalists Terry Steele, Yvette Nii and Jim Gilstrap.

The set gets under way with the dramatic and atmospheric “Winds of Change,” a GRAMMY®-nominated composition from Hiroshima’s 1980 release, *Odori*. “It’s out there,” says Kuramoto of the song’s ethereal and sweeping arrangement, “but it’s real music as far as we’re concerned. It’s vintage Hiroshima, filled with lots of colors, drama and emotions, and it’s played – now as then – with all the heart and soul and spirit that we can muster.”

Other noteworthy tracks in the first half of the sequence include the simultaneously shimmering and funky hit single “One Wish” (originally from *Another Place*, released in 1985), as well as the poignant “I’ve Been Here Before” (from *Go*, 1987).

The **Legacy** version of “Another Place” is a reflection of the evolution that has taken place within and around this song in the 20-plus years since it was first recorded. “The original version of this song was a little over three minutes long,” says Kuramoto. “The version we do here runs more than nine minutes. It features two gargantuan solos, one by June and another by Kimo. People love this extended version in our shows, so we thought, ‘Why don’t we just do our live version of that song for this record?’”

The set closes with “Thousand Cranes” (from *East*, released in 1989), a stirring ballad that positions June Kuramoto’s koto firmly within a contemporary jazz context. Just about every player on this track offers his or her voice to create a gentle but heartfelt prayer for peace that gives this new version of the song a valedictory note.

Other **Legacy** tracks and their original sources include: “Turning Point” (*Providence*, 1992), “Dada” (*Hiroshima*, 1979), “East” (*East*, 1989), “Roomful of Mirrors” (*Hiroshima*, 1979), “Save Yourself for Me” (*Another Place*, 1985), “Hawaiian Electric” (*Go*, 1987).

Despite its retrospective sensibilities, **Legacy** is by no means a swan song for Hiroshima. Rather, it’s bookend to thirty years of innovative music, and a promise of more great things to come. “I would like to think that there’s a heart and a voice within this music that doesn’t go out of style,” says Kuramoto. “These songs are as fresh and meaningful to us today as they were the first time they were recorded. They’re not of a particular genre. They are our musical heart. They shift gears from Japanese to jazz to salsa to R&B and beyond. Throughout each piece, you can hear the echoes of all the experiences that have influenced us along the way.”