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HIROSHIMA CELEBRATES CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN NEW HEADS UP RELEASE

Little Tokyo embraces the sounds and sensibilities of Asia, the Middle East, Latin America and beyond

Since Hiroshima's inception in 1980, the group has assumed the artistic mission of bridging cultural divides through the power of music. Founded in east L.A. by Japanese Americans Dan and June Kuramoto, Hiroshima has borrowed from numerous cultures – Asian, Latin American, African American and more – and merged these influences into a unique and innovative whole that is solely their own. The result is a brand of music that speaks to nearly every aspect of contemporary culture.

The goodwill mission continues with the May 22, 2007, release of *Little Tokyo* (HUCD 3123), Hiroshima's fourth album on Heads Up International. The album title, a reference to the well known Asian neighborhood in southern California, is Hiroshima's nod to the increasing importance in 21st century America of maintaining a positive and all-inclusive world view from our own respective back yards.

"We're always looking at things from a multicultural perspective," says Kuramoto. "We live in southern California, where the ethnic population is in the majority. We see this as the coolest thing about America. Its strength and its vision comes from its multi-ethnicity. Those differences are going to give us the strength to be more unified. The more we homogenize, the more we give up that notion of cultural diversity, and the less we'll understand each other."

Indeed, the eleven tracks on *Little Tokyo* embrace numerous musical styles and showcase a band that deftly weaves them together into a satisfying tapestry. "Midnight Sun" is the album's infectious opener, a slightly mysterious but highly melodic track that's front-loaded with a Middle Eastern hook yet spotlights the work of two taiko drum masters, longtime group member Shoji Kameda and his teacher, Kenny Endo. "We have both the student and the master playing on this record," says Kuramoto, "and on some of the tracks they're playing together. Each is an outstanding musician in his own right, and when they play together they truly complement each other."

Kameda and Endo reappear – together and separately – at various points along the way ("Hidden Times," "Shades of Honor," "Hiro Chill" and elsewhere), adding an exotic dimension at every turn.

The second track, “On the Fence,” gets under way with an opening riff by keyboardist Kimo Cornwell and bassist Dean Cortez that is deceptively laid back yet energized at the same time. The track blossoms into a lighthearted arrangement that enables Kuramoto and Cornwell to trade licks and stretch their artistic muscles without crowding each other or the song itself.

Guest keyboardist and Heads Up labelmate James Lloyd, on loan from Pieces of a Dream, steps in for the catchy “Lanai.” The track allows plenty of room for the Asian sensibilities of June Kuramoto’s koto work and the contemporary jazz flavor of Dan Kuramoto’s tenor sax.

The midtempo “Sir Charles” is perhaps the most culturally and stylistically blended track in the set, with June Kuramoto’s koto deftly juxtaposed against the congas, timbales and other gadgetry of guest percussionist Richie Gajate Garcia. At any given moment in this four-and-a-half minute track, one is likely to hear elements of Asian, Latin, rock and pop music.

“Quan Yin (Goddess of Compassion)” features Karen Hwa-Chee Han on erhu, a Chinese stringed instrument whose hypnotic timbre falls somewhere between the violin and the female human voice. The song sits atop acoustic bassist Dean Taba’s simple but solid jazz riffs, and features generous contributions from Cornwell and June Kuramoto’s koto.

The syncopated closer, “Little Tokyo Underground,” is Hiroshima’s tip of the hat to jazz cats who are daring enough to take chances by setting up funky grooves and working them to their maximum potential, regardless of prevailing musical sensibilities. “Everything is just so marginalized these days, and played so safe,” says Kuramoto. “So many musicians are so afraid to stretch themselves. There’s so little that they’re allowed to play if they want to survive commercially. But we as a band have always believed that there’s more to it than that, and we will continue on our journey to explore those possibilities, regardless of the next fad on the horizon.”

Kuramoto understands that Hiroshima’s optimistic view of multiculturalism may be difficult for some to grasp, but to his way of thinking, the artist’s role has always been rooted in idealism over realism.

“Optimism is not generated on likelihood,” he says. “What I do know is the lessons I’ve learned from guys like Miles Davis and James Moody – or various other prominent or groundbreaking artists throughout history, for that matter. You have a vision, and you live according to that vision every day, in everything you do and everything you create. Look at Van Gogh, one of the great painters of all time. He never sold a painting in his life, but he changed the way the entire world looks at art and artists. That’s the role of the artist in society – to constantly reshuffle the deck and force the rest of us to look at the world in a different way.”

Learn more about Hiroshima and their music at www.hiroshimamusic.com.

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