

HIROSHIMA

Profile

In 1971, Duke Ellington recorded an album entitled *The Afro-Eurasian Eclipse*. As part of that work, Ellington proclaimed “that whole world was going [Asian],” and that no one would know “who was in the shadow of whom.” The celebrated ensemble known as Hiroshima is the fulfillment of Ellington’s prophecy. In the three decades since they first convened, the Los Angeles-based ensemble of Dan Kuramoto (keyboards/woodwinds/composer/producer), June Okida Kuramoto (koto), Danny Yamamoto (drums), Kimo Cornwell (piano/keyboards), Dean Cortez (bass) and newest member Shoji Kameda (taiko drum/percussion) have blended jazz, pop, and rock with traditional Japanese folk music and instruments. The resulting sound was a pioneering voice in the world music movement of the late 20th century.

While Hiroshima have sold more than three million records in their prolific career, they’ve done something even more important in the process: they’ve introduced a variety of traditional Asian instruments to a global audience, and integrated them seamlessly into a new music and art form. The Japanese koto, a zither-like, 13-stringed instrument, shakuhachi, a five holed bamboo flute, and the powerful taiko (which literally means drum) combine with instruments with the Western Hemisphere to create their unique musical palette.

For Hiroshima – which takes its name from the Japanese city that sustained a nuclear blast during World War II, yet rose phoenix-like from its own ashes – the “ride” began in the polyglot metropolis of Los Angeles. Of all of the members, only June Kuramoto was born in Japan. She arrived in Los Angeles when she was six and lived in an African-American neighborhood. As Dan Kuramoto, her ex-husband recalls, “When she came here from Japan, she couldn’t speak a word of English. As is by providence, the leading koto player of Japan needed a place to teach. This madam Kazue Kudo taught at June’s house in the ghetto. In exchange, June got free koto lessons. As June grew as a classical prodigy, so did the influence of her life in America. By junior high school she asked her teacher if she could play songs by the Temptations on the koto. “She’s always had a soulful feel in her playing.” Dan Kuramoto, who sang in a Baptist church choir during his youth, also grew up with an interest in African-American music and multiculturalism.

Dan and June formed Hiroshima in 1974. Their self-titled debut on Arista in 1979 spawned the hit single, “Roomful of Mirrors” and the intense showstopper, “Da Da.” They quickly developed a loyal following among cities with African-American audiences – particularly Washington, DC, Chicago and Atlanta – and they enjoyed radio airplay on black and contemporary jazz radio stations nationwide.

Their subsequent albums were equally successful. *Odori*, released in 1980, earned a Grammy nomination. In 1983, they signed with Epic and released *Third Generation*. Two years later, *Another Place* generated the popular single, “One Wish,” and became their first gold record. *Go*, released in 1987, sat at the top of the *Billboard* Contemporary Jazz Chart for three months, and the album won a Soul Train Award for Best Jazz Album of 1987.

East, released two years later, contained music from *Sansei*, Hiroshima's critically acclaimed play that was performed at the Los Angeles Music Center's Mark Taper Forum. *Providence* (1992) featured "Time on the Nile," a tribute to Miles Davis (with whom they'd toured before his death in 1991), and an inventive rendition of Stevie Wonder's "Ribbon in the Sky." After their stint with Epic, Hiroshima signed with Quincy Jones's Qwest label and released *LA* (1994), an album that encouraged healing in the aftermath of the L.A. race riots, and *Urban World Music* (1996), which featured Quiet Storm sounds with Average White Band vocalist Hamish Stewart. Voted top ten record of the year by The Network, *Between Black and White* followed in 1999 on the Windham Hill Jazz imprint.

The band joined the Heads Up label with the 2003 release of *The Bridge*, a recording that extended their unique and universal artistry into the 21st century. They followed with the 2004 release of *Spirit of the Season*, a holiday album that celebrates cultural diversity in a way that only a L.A.-based Asian American band with shades of Latin percussion and other world music sensibilities can do.

In the spring of 2005, the group released *Obon*, their first instrumental record and a tribute to the musicians, places and events that have inspired the band throughout the years. *Obon* also marked the band's 25th anniversary and the 60th anniversary of the imprisonment of the Japanese during WWII.

Hiroshima's latest Heads Up release, *Little Tokyo*, is set for release on May 22, 2007. The album title, a reference to the well known Asian neighborhood in southern California, is the group's nod to the increasing importance in 21st century America of maintaining a positive multicultural world view in the midst of international and intercultural tensions.

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

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23309 Commerce Park Rd. Cleveland, Ohio 44122 USA
(P) 216.765.7381 (F) 216.464.6037
headsup@headsup.com
WWW.I-HEADSUP.COM