

## Little Tokyo

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Something seems to happen to many bands after they enter 20 to 25 years of making music. They seem to run out of new and interesting things to say and pretty soon all they do is recycle the same scant ideas over and over as they become dim parodies of themselves. You see this happen all the time in rock 'n roll where, too often, making money takes precedence over having anything new and fresh to say.

How fortunate it is that Hiroshima doesn't play rock. If anything the band has stayed fresh and innovative by merging jazz, R&B, and world music with an awesome array of Japanese percussion and other native instruments like June Kuramoto's koto. Hiroshima makes some truly diverse and interesting music and Little Tokyo, its fourteenth album, is the second consecutive release without a featured vocalist. The decision to eschew a singer is a smart move by Hiroshima as it puts the music first instead of merely sounding like the back-up band.

Dan Kuramoto's mournful tenor sax offsets the booming taiko drums of Shoji Kameda and Kenny Endo, as June Kuramoto's koto solidifies the Far Eastern roots of the group and sets the tone for the rest of the album. Kimo Cornwell's piano and keyboards are standouts, particularly so on "On the Fence," and again as he trades off with keyboardist James Lloyd from Pieces of A Dream as he sits in on the lovely "Lanai."

Just because Hiroshima can play it sophisticated and stylish doesn't mean they can't get down. "Red Beans and Rice," by Cornwell, is an homage by the band to the spirit and culture of New Orleans as it struggles to rise again from the disaster of Hurricane Katrina, showing off some nasty-as-he-wanna-be bass by Dean Cortez.

There has been an ongoing love affair between Hiroshima and black American music since the band began in 1979. They don't just want to sit back and close your eyes in blissful contemplation; they want you to get up and dance or at the very least snap your fingers, bob your head and shake your groove thing. "Drama," "Hiro Chill" and "Little Tokyo Underground" are all designed provoke such a reaction. Unlike some bands whose attempts to jam seem contrived and calculated, Hiroshima never lapses into a parody of a dance band. Its foundation is, first and foremost, a jazz band that knows how to groove and when to lay back and soothe.

Little Tokyo is ample evidence Hiroshima is still rising and advancing as a musical force to be reckoned with and respected. There's no danger of them joining the country fair circuit of broken-down oldies bands dutifully cranking out tired version of past hits. Dan Kuramoto and the rest of Hiroshima are still challenging themselves, making innovative music and having fun in the process.

Track listing: Midnight Sun; On the Fence; Lanai; Red Beans and Rice; Sir Charles; Hidden Times; Shades of Honor; Quan Yin; Drama; Hiro Chill; Little Tokyo Underground.

Personnel: June Kuramoto: koto; Dan Kuramoto: tenor and soprano saxophone, flute, keyboards, synthesizer, percussion, shakuhachi; Kimo Cornwell: piano, synthesizer, rhodes, clavinet; Danny Yamamoto: drums; Dean Cortez: bass; Shoji Kameda: taiko, percussion, voice; Dean Taba: acoustic bass (1, 6, 8, 10); Kenny Endo: taiko, percussion (1, 6-8, 11); Richie Gajate Garcia: conga, percussion (1, 5, 7, 8); James Lloyd: keyboards, synthesizers (2); Mary Garcia: coquito (5); Leslie Chew: guitars (9).

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"Jazz Monthly Feature Interview" Hiroshima  
Use the link below, to read the interview!

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Twenty-two years ago Hiroshima scored a huge smooth jazz single with "One Wish," a tune so popular it's still played a million times a day on radio. The Los Angeles-based band hasn't come close to replicating that success on the airwaves, but the band's new CD confirms that it's still one of the most challenging and engaging actual bands around. Named after the historic section of Los Angeles, the new CD makes a compelling, positive statement with its fusion of jazz, pop, rock and Far East elements.

Dan Kuramoto was the undisputed leader of the group in 1980 and remains so today. His compositional skills are first-rate, but what's often overlooked is just how deft he is on sax. On "Midnight Sun," which features a dark and compelling melody wrapped around June Kuramoto's haunting koto, Kuramoto's deep tenor adds a splash of mainstream jazz to the mystical proceedings. Jazz comes back to the fore on "Red Beans and Rice," dedicated to the good people of New Orleans, with manic keys solos by Kimo Cornwell. Little Tokyo is a cohesive project spotlighting musicians and various cultures, but the one track that rises up, due to its uniqueness, is "Hiro Chill." The peppy little number slyly nods at the chill music genre and its keys and synths are reminiscent of "One Wish." It's a fine bookend to that classic.

-Brian Soergel

WWW.JAZZTIMES

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<http://www.jazzreview.com/cd/review-18828.html>

Hiroshima has been around since 1980 and has successfully brought a new sense of jazz to contemporary jazz with its mixture of jazz styles and world music. Hiroshima has pioneered and developed a sound that is uniquely theirs with influences from Asian, Latin American, African American, and more. Their music is imaginative with its intricate jazz motifs.

There are eleven songs in this CD collection. These songs are "Midnight Sun," "On the Fence," "Lanai," "Red Beans and Rice," "Sir Charles," "Hidden Times," "Shades of Honor," "Quan Yin," "Drama," "Hiro Chill," and "Little Tokyo Underground." These songs reflect the themes found in Little Tokyo, a well-known Asian neighborhood in Southern California. "Quan Yin" and "Red Beans and Rice" speak volumes on how harmony can be fully realized in a jazz setting! These songs will appeal to a large audience.

There is an exotic dimension to this CD collection the defies definition. That it is one of Hiroshima's most creative releases to date is definite. Every performance shines with individuality, whether in solo or in group expression.

The songs in this collection are highly lyrical, positive, and enjoyable listening. Hiroshima continues to provide jazz listening audiences with top of the line performances and music. Highly recommended.

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"Their first all-instrumental album, 2004's Obon, allowed them to go back to their original blend of Eastern instruments and jazz fusion—a commercially risky but artistically rewarding direction that blooms on Little Tokyo...truly remarkable work."

Jazziz

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"Little Tokyo is Hiroshima's brilliant musical reference to the importance of maintaining a positive, multicultural world view in the midst of international and intercultural tensions. The group has often used this type of subject matter and symbolism in their songs to convey the feelings and moods which have been inspired by current events, places, and people. The 11 songs span several musical styles including sensibilities inherent in Middle Eastern, Latin American, and Asian music."

All Music

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Launch Radio

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"Hiroshima brings a hot album to the forefront. Excellent from start to finish."

Jay Vee Music (Alabama)

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“Little Tokyo is the fourth album by Hiroshima on the Heads Up label and the band continues its artistic mission of bridging cultural divides through the power of music...The eleven tracks on Little Tokyo embrace numerous musical styles and a band that knows how to weave them together into a satisfying musical blend.”

Urban Music Scene

“With close to 30 years under their belts as an ensemble, and sales that are nothing to sneeze at, you have a crew that knows how to deftly keep ears open and looking forward. Snazzy stuff for the new age, this is a forward thinking set that you have to sit back and absorb as well as enjoy.”

Midwest Record

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“Hiroshima’s album Little Tokyo is a multicultural, adventurous and enigmatic project which will certainly captivate listeners with all its musical facets.”

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“Hiroshima’s blend of Asian jazz fusion is almost intoxicating with the big drum sounds, plentiful percussion and cool rhythms...they move through 11 songs with the same energy they’ve carried since 1980 when Dan and June Kuramoto got the wheel rolling. They haven’t lost a beat.”

O’s Place Jazz Newsletter

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JazzTimes

“Over the last few albums [Hiroshima] have been filtering out the extraneous elements and honing in on their essential sound. Little Tokyo is their most fully-realized project. It's unadulterated Hiroshima music, and it's a stunner.”

SmoothViews.com

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“The music—jazz, rock, and even hints of Middle Eastern at times—ebbs and flows in an invigorating way, providing the listener a soothing multicultural mix without all the political correctness or brow beating.”

Toledo Blade

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