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Sonicwonderland by Hiromi & Hiromi's Sonicwonder

(Telarc)

BY JON M. GILBERTSON OCT. 06, 2023 10:10 A.M.

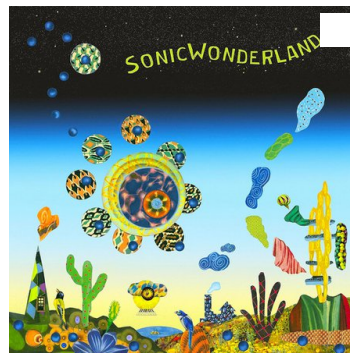
Across a dozen albums during the last two decades, pianist and composer Hiromi Uehara has tested herself solo, undertaken explorations with her estimable Trio Project, written for and played with a string quartet, and given a fusion spin to Gershwin and Debussy.

On *Sonicwonderland*, she makes her recorded debut with her new quartet, Sonicwonder, after she began performing with the band in spring, and she relaxes enough to let impishness infiltrate the discipline that guides her overall sense of adventure.

The imp manifests as easygoing funk during the seven minutes and 15 seconds of “Wanted,” which opens the album as if letting the listener get acquainted with the core skills of each musician: the sassy languor of trumpeter Adam O’Farrill, the lightly deployed dexterity of bassist Hadrien Feraud, and the attentive pulse of drummer Gene Coye.

Hiromi displays her skills in “Wanted” as well, starting with Elton John’s melodic simplicity and Count Basie’s ability to hang back before she contributes a solo that starts in the lounge and ends with a deft lock-in to the rest of the band’s groove.

With other tracks, Hiromi alternates her Yamaha grand with electronic keyboards, varying her approaches so that in “Trial and Error,” she switches from effervescent chirps to pensive organ fills to squirrely spirals of plastic notes; or, in the title track, she does a Rick Wakeman speedrun without the prog pretensions.



Neither she nor Sonicwonder spurns classicist jazz: “Polaris” spends a considerable amount of its run time as a limpid ballad before shifting toward modernism, and “Reminiscence,” a co-write with U.K. singer-songwriter Oli Rockberger, is comfort food for those who need vocals in their romantic music.

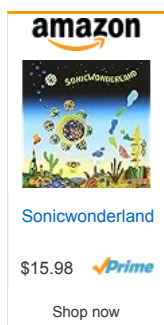
Yet the final track, “Bonus Stage,” mixes Nintendo with Scott Joplin, and Hiromi’s imp flashes a contagious grin. *Sonicwonderland* thus ends with a probably intentional suggestion that Hiromi wants to have more fun...and seek out more wonder.

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