**HIROMI bio; OUT THERE**

Over more than 20 years as a recording artist, the jazz piano phenomenon Hiromi has shifted seamlessly from one spellbinding project to the next. In the process, she’s earned a reputation as one of the most explosive live performers in jazz history and a global ambassador for the art form. Her many triumphs include an NPR Tiny Desk Concert that has racked up 2 million views; the opportunity to represent her native Japan with a performance at the 2021 Summer Olympics in Tokyo; 2024 winner for Best Music Score for the animated feature film Blue Giant (Award of the Japanese Academy); and a GRAMMY Award for a collaboration with fusion hero Stanley Clarke. Her artistry is — to borrow a descriptor the *New Yorker* favored — “dazzling.”

In 2023, she released *Sonicwonderland*, debuting perhaps the most expressive, dynamic and versatile working band of her career. Called Hiromi’s Sonicwonder and featuring Hadrien Feraud on bass, Gene Coye on drums and the trumpeter Adam O’Farrill, the group furthered Hiromi’s distinctive musical alchemy: the spirit of classic jazz-rock fusion melded with classically rooted virtuosity, entrancing funk, pop flourishes and, through O’Farrill’s trumpet, acoustic jazz’s state of the art.

The album also did a remarkable job of capturing Hiromi’s mastery as a live entertainer. As the *Guardian* noted, “*Sonicwonderland* is perhaps the closest thing to Hiromi’s onstage exuberance.”

But that was only the beginning.

Over the past two years, Sonicwonder has continued to tour and work together consistently, advancing their deep chemistry and fearless sense of interplay. The results can be heard on Hiromi’s new Concord release and 13th studio full-length album, *OUT THERE*, in which the group’s powerful rapport meets the pianist’s astonishing abilities as a composer on equal footing.

As Hiromi explains, “On *Sonicwonderland*, I had the concept and the songs first, and I was looking for the people who could play the music in the ideal way that I had in my mind.

“Being with this group for well over a year,” she continues, “playing a lot of shows together and understanding each other, I started to see more of their strength and what shines in them the most. So I started to write music with them in mind.”

Sonicwonder brings together world-class musicians of fascinatingly diverse backgrounds. French-born Feraud is a fusion virtuoso who has been rightfully compared to bass god Jaco Pastorius. Coye hails from Chicago, where he grew up playing in church, and combines technical mastery with a soulful knack for groove and pocket. Brooklyn-raised O’Farrill, part of a dynasty that includes his father and grandfather, Latin-jazz titans Arturo and Chico O’Farrill, ranks among the most important and progressive trumpeters of his generation. Throughout the album, O’Farrill conjures up audacious new sonic textures through electronics — part of his toolbox that Hiromi encouraged him to develop fully.

“[Bass legend and collaborator] Anthony Jackson always told me that a first-class musician can do anything,” Hiromi says. “You don’t really have to put them in one genre or one category.” Knowing that anything she composed would be met with outstanding performances, Hiromi let her fiercest ambitions run wild when crafting the music for *OUT THERE*. “It all comes from curiosity,” she explains. “I think curiosity is the key to everything. How can you express yourself more? How can you write more?”

The core of *OUT THERE* is its four-part title suite, which Hiromi would like fans to hear as a focused front-to-back listen. “I know that these days streaming gives you one song at a time,” she says, “but I hope they listen to it straight through, giving them a whole new experience.” The suite is nothing less than a tour de force, and certainly deserves undivided attention.

It opens with the rapid-fire melody of “Takin’ Off,” shared nimbly on the frontline between Hiromi and O’Farrill, and traverses the sly ’70s fusion grooves of “Strollin’,” which calls to mind Herbie Hancock, George Duke and Grover Washington Jr. “Orion” follows, with bold and triumphant bookends that could score a great work of science fiction. Hiromi wrote it as a kind of “answer song” to “Polaris,” included on *Sonicwonderland*. Both compositions reflect the fact that “stars are a guide,” she says. “You know where you are if you look up at the sky. You can go toward an adventure; there’s nothing to be scared of.” The suite closes with “The Quest,” which unites the chopped-up rhythmic thrust of current jazz with the synth pleasures of vintage prog-rock.

Hiromi crafted the suite, chock-full of thrilling twists and turns, as a celebration of our post-pandemic moment, when we can once again live with a sense of exploration. “Now is the time to go *out there* and find something new,” she implores. And that sense of excitement isn’t exclusive to the suite; rather, it defines *OUT THERE* in its entirety.

The album kicks off with the very first song Hiromi released as a recording artist back in 2003: “XYZ,” a delirious burner that, with O’Farrill’s trumpet, takes on hues of avant-garde-leaning Blue Note LPs from the 1960s. “That has always been a very special song for me and for fans,” she says, calling it a “signature Hiromi song.” “Yes! Ramen!!,” a tribute to Hiromi’s all-time-favorite food, is another wild ride boasting synth hooks, ska-tinged rhythms, revved-up disco beats, a big Black Sabbath-sounding riff, leading-edge jazz improvisation, contemporary classical and more. *Whew.* The band shares Hiromi’s love for ramen, especially O’Farrill and Coye, and they try to hit as many spots as possible on tour. “For this song, it was more like putting a soundtrack to the film I had in my head,” she says. “When the landscape changes, then different music comes in — different restaurant, different style.”

Hiromi’s “Pendulum” appears in two versions, including a vocal take featuring Michelle Willis, best known for her collaborations with Becca Stevens and the late David Crosby. Hiromi had long been a fan of Willis’ work, and calls her a “beautiful voice, and a very strong musician.” The pianist’s arrangement is ballad-to-midtempo jazz kissed by sensual neo-soul, and the original lyrics, co-written by Willis and Hiromi, are “about life,” the pianist says — “the come and go of it. Life is like a wave, or like a kind of pendulum. You have to go with the flow.”

Later in the album, Hiromi offers a beautiful and contemplative solo-piano performance of “Pendulum,” which she’s been including in her live sets for a couple of years now. “What I really enjoy the most with solo piano is playing the softest dynamic that I can play,” she explains. She loves to savor the sound of her instrument in this quietude, which also offers her audience a moment of rest following an especially pyrotechnic ensemble moment.

The finale of Hiromi’s new album is also *OUT THERE*’s most delightful track: “Balloon Pop,” which is as much of an earworm as anything currently on the Hot 100. (And with O’Farrill on trumpet, its hummable theme summons up Miles Davis’ hook-filled ’80s recordings.)

And therein lies the secret to Hiromi’s monumental success — her rare ability to deliver not only show-stopping virtuosity but also sheer joy. “I love playing ‘Balloon Pop,” she says. “Every audience goes home singing this lick — well after the show has finished. The chord changes are challenging, but still it doesn’t sound complicated. I just wanted to write some songs that are singable, danceable and *fun*.”