

Hiromi

When a young artist arrives on the scene with claims to defy categories, the declaration often rings like a hollow cliché. But pianist Hiromi Uehara makes good on the promise. *Another Mind*, her debut album on Telarc, conjures an alchemy of jazz, pop, classical, avant-garde and various other musical shades and dimensions into a compelling whole that stretches convention to its limit and dares listeners to straitjacket her with hackneyed labels.

Born in Shizuoka, Japan, in 1979, Hiromi took her first piano lessons at age six. She learned from her earliest teacher to tap into the intuitive as well as the technical aspects of music.

"Her energy was always so high, and she was so emotional," Hiromi says of her first piano teacher. "When she wanted me to play with a certain kind of dynamics, she wouldn't say it with technical terms. If the piece was something passionate, she would say, 'Play red.' Or if it was something mellow, she would say, 'Play blue.' I could really play from my heart that way, and not just from my ears."

Hiromi took that intuitive approach a step further when she enrolled in the Yamaha School of Music less than a year after her first piano lessons. By age 12, she was performing in public, sometimes with very high-profile orchestras. "When I was 14, I went to Czechoslovakia and played with the Czech Philharmonic," she says. "That was a great experience, to play with such a professional orchestra."

Further into her teens, her tastes expanded to include jazz as well as classical music. A chance meeting with Chick Corea when she was 17 led to a performance with the well-known jazz pianist the very next day.

"It was in Tokyo," Hiromi recalls. "He was doing something at Yamaha, and I was visiting Tokyo at the time to take some lessons. I talked to some teachers and said that I really wanted to see him. I sat down with him, and he said 'Play something.' So I played something, and then he said, 'Can you improvise?' I told him I could, and we did some two-piano improvisations. Then he asked me if I was free the next day. I told him I was, and he said, 'Well, I have a concert tomorrow. Why don't you come?' So I went there, and he called my name at the end of the concert, and we did some improvisations together."

After a couple years of writing advertising jingles for Nissan and a few other high-profile Japanese companies, Hiromi came to the United States in 1999 to study at the Berklee School of Music in Boston, where she's scheduled to graduate in May 2003. For as open as her musical sensibilities had already been when she came to the U.S., the Berklee experience has pushed her envelope even further.

"It's expanded so much the way I see music," she says. "Some people dig jazz, some people dig classical music, some people dig rock. Everyone is so concerned about who they like. They always say, 'This guy is the best,' 'No, this guy is the best.' But I think everyone is great. I really don't have barriers to any type of music. I could listen to everything from metal to classical music to anything else."

Among her mentors at Berklee is veteran jazz bassist Richard Evans, who teaches arranging and orchestration. Evans co-produced *Another Mind* with longtime friend and collaborator Ahmad Jamal, who has also taken a personal interest in Hiromi's artistic development. "She is nothing short of amazing," says Jamal. "Her music, together with her overwhelming charm and spirit, causes her to soar to unimaginable musical heights."

At 23, Hiromi stands at the threshold of limitless possibility, constantly drawing inspiration from virtually everyone and everything around her. Her list of influences, like her music itself, is boundless. "I love Bach, I love Oscar Peterson, I love Franz Liszt, I love Ahmad Jamal," she says. "I also love people like Sly and the Family Stone, Dream Theatre and King Crimson. Also, I'm so much inspired by sports players like Carl Lewis and Michael Jordan. Basically, I'm inspired by anyone who has big, big energy. They really come straight to my heart."

But she won't, as a matter of principle, put labels on her music. She'll continue to follow whatever moves her, and leave the definitions to others.

"I don't want to put a name on my music," she says. "Other people can put a name on what I do. It's just the union of what I've been listening to and what I've been learning. It has some elements of classical music, it has some rock, it has some jazz, but I don't want to give it a name."

To listen is to understand. Hear what's happening inside Another Mind.