

Masako

Wanderlust



There is something so personal, so intimate about pianist and composer **Masako**'s latest album **Wanderlust**. The stories are from experiences of her heart and soul and with such inspiration, these eleven contemporary tunes reveal her genuine emotions as never before. The album is a mix of piano and light accompaniment by some fine talents and the sense of it is a freeform, dare to fly kind of feeling. Every song is a point or a place in time where life either changed dramatically or came brightly into focus for this talented artist. Translating these results, these experiences into music seems to be Masako's forte.

Slightly reminiscent of one of Masako's previous albums called *Hidden Flowers*, **Lily of the Valley** has the same freshness, the same touch of green growth of that work. Tiny white flowers reach for the springtime sun and bloom for a short time. Masako's shy, introductory notes are those blooms sneaking up out of the earth to delight the eyes, but this time our hearts are enchanted by this solo piano rendition.

Ocean and You is one of the best cuts on the album. It is intricate, sophisticated tune with a lot of moving musical parts. What starts out as a soothing simple introduction grows and swells into a complex sea of cello, violin, piano and a rather haunting siren voice. You can imagine rippling waves, a distant seabird, even the sun shining on whitecaps. Everything you need to become adrift with your thoughts is right here. You can thank Charlie Bisharat and Eugene Freisen for the string accompaniment.

The snow reflects the morning sky and the ground looks the palest blue. At the edge of the woods, **Wintering Birds** jump out and scratch for their meal. The cardinal, the blue jay, even the tiny sparrow looks dazzling against this fresh white canvas. Masako's pastoral tune reminds us that even in the midst of the worst winter ever, there is color and life to be observed and celebrated.

The Japanese have this wonderful concept called *shinrin-yoku* or forest bathing. Trust me, I do this a lot myself. The forest gives up its treasures of peace, calm, clean air, beauty, and much more when you visit it with an open heart. The tune **Forestology** seems to be appropriate for just such an occasion. Breathe in, breathe out and immerse yourself in *shinrin-yoku*. Distant horns, keyboards, and fervent piano all converge into a memorable visit.

The title tune, **Wanderlust** is a solo piano anthem for global travelers whether they are on a screen, in an open book, or a just a dreamer. Masako's warm, energizing tune musically paves a path to expansive oceans, towering forests, and even down a promising rabbit hole or two. With this tune in mind, I think the lesson here can be defined by a quote by Anita Desai which says "*Wherever You Go Becomes a Part of You Somehow.*"

What was once a deep, narrow valley became the breathtaking Lake Willoughby in northern Vermont. With Jeff Oster's haunting flugelhorn, Tom Eaton on synth and Masako on piano, the vivid landscape comes to life. **Lake Willoughby** is the music you might hear if you sat on the bluff on a sunny day in mid-September. The lake below ripples with sunshine, the hills form a colorful chaos of leaves, and peace is at hand.

The final cut which is a solo piano work is called **Wisdom of the Heart**. It is a deeply emotional piece with a melody that connects city and country, four seasons, and a promise that every day will be special from now on. There is a careful mix of ensemble and solo pieces that balance texture and emotion very well here. This composer has only been releasing albums for a short while, but her musical maturity has grown considerably. Wanderlust is Masako's best and most satisfying recording to date. Highly listenable. - R J Lannan, Artisan Music Reviews