

The
PIANO
of
SHOTARO MORIYASU

Solographer: Jan Evensmo
Last update: Nov. 8, 2017

Born: Tokyo, Jan. 5, 1924
Died: Tokyo, Sept. 28, 1955

Introduction:

When my good friend Japanese jazz collector Keizo Takada introduced me to “The Historic Mocambo Session” and Shotaro Moriyasu’s piano artistry many years ago, I was highly surprised, perhaps due to my total lack of knowledge about Japanese modern jazz. Since then I have played the two LPs many times, and the nickname “Japanese Bud Powell” is well deserved. If there ever was an almost forgotten but yet legendary jazz performer deserving to be remembered and included in the Jazz Archeology solography files, Shotaru Moriyasu is the one!

History:

Moriyasu graduated from Keio University and, after a brief and unhappy period as a refrigerator salesman, took up music professionally during the Occupation-inspired “entertainment boom” of the late 1940s. Inspired initially by Teddy Wilson, Moriyasu began to explore Bud Powell’s music around 1950 while performing at Yokohama’s 400 Club with the Red Hot Boys. While most other pianists were studying Lennie Tristano and George Shearing, Moriyasu was listening to as many bebop records as he could, often writing down not only melodies but also each instrument’s solo part, bass lines, drum fills, and harmonic progressions, resulting in piles of musical scores. Moriyasu was also a reliable presence at the occasional Yokohama jam sessions that brought Japanese musicians together with American GIs such as Hampton Hawes, Hal Stein and Walter Benton. Before long he was regarded as the most studied and advanced bopper in Japan, whose awesome technique and odd personal habits intimidated many musicians and audiences. But he found a musical soulmate in tenor saxophonist Akira Miyazawa, resulting in a brief but inspiring period of exploratory musicmaking with the Four Sounds. Moriyasu’s pale, sickly countenance suggested a salaried office worker rather than the hippest pianist in Japan. The fact that he was recorded only once, in a jam session setting, certainly adds to the mystique surrounding him. On the rainy night of 28 September 1955, Moriyasu threw himself in front of a train at Meguro station in Tokyo. The identity of the dead man was not known for five days. Miyazawa’s eulogy in *Swing Journal* praised a “genius born of effort.”
(ref. <http://www.jazz.com/encyclopedia/moriyasu-shotaro>)

SHOTARO MORIYASU SOLOGRAPHY

THE HISTORIC MOCAMBO SESSION Yokohama, July 27/28, 1954

Akira Watanabe (as-item 2,4,5-8,10), Sadao Watanabe (as-item 5,7,8,10), Akitoshi Igarashi (as-item-7,8), Kei-Ichiro Ebihara (as-item 8), Akira Miyazawa (as-item 1-6,9), Shotaro Moriyasu (p-all items), Hisao Suzuki (b-items 1-6), Tatsuro Takimoto (b-item 7,8), Toshiko Akiyoshi (b-9), Jun Shimizu (dm-item 1-4,6,7,9-10), Taketoshi Igarashi (dm-item 5,8).

Ten titles (more without SM) were recorded by 19-year-old university student Kiyoshi Iwami in an all-night session at the Mocambo Club:

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| 1 | I Want To Be Happy 10:06 | Intro 8 bars.
Solo 11 choruses of 32 bars.
Acc. (b) 32 bars. (F) |
| 2 | Out Of Nowhere 11:01 | Intro 8 bars.
Solo 5 choruses of 32 bars. (M) |
| 3 | This Love Of Mine 6:12 | Intro 4 bars (breakdown).
Intro 4 bars. Acc. (ts) 32 bars.
Solo 32 bars. Acc. (ts) 16 bars. (S) |
| 4 | Strike Up The Band 16:03 | Intro 8 bars.
Solo 12 choruses of 32 bars.
Acc. (b) 2 choruses. (F) |
| 5 | On A Slow Boat To China 9:13 | Solo 4 choruses of 32 bars. (FM) |
| 6 | Everything Happens To Me 7:52 | Intro 4 bars. Solo 32 bars. (S) |
| 7 | Steeple Chase 10:26 | Intro 4 bars.
Solo 5 choruses of 32 bars.
Acc. (b) 16 bars to fade out. (FM) |
| 8 | Perdido 22:53 | Intro 8 bars.
Solo 6 choruses of 32 bars
to acc. (b) 1 chorus. (FM) |
| 9 | It's Only A Paper Moon 5:14 | Intro to acc. (as) to
solo 64 bars. Coda. (M) |
| 10 | My Funny Valentine 7:56 | Intro 4 bars to acc. (as) 36 bars
to solo 36 bars (S) to acc. (as). (M) |

The total minutes of playing time for this legendary Yokohama session is more than 1 ½ hours, and we get an depth and very favourable impression of modern Japanese jazz in the middle thirties, many very good jazz musicians to be heard. However, one man stands out as a shining star, the pianist Shotaro Moriyasu. His dynamic playing is not only a great surprise but an important addition to the group of modern jazz pioneers headed by Bud Powell. In fact SM's style is quite close that of Bud. Just start on side A. of LP1 with an uptempo "... Happy", offering eleven choruses with great energy and amazing inventiveness. "Strike Up ..." has much of the same, an intensity and heat that literally push him on. But he commands any tempo, "... Nowhere" is an excellent example in medium tempo, five logical and beautiful choruses, again much in the way Bud did it. There are also two items in slow tempo, "This Love ..." and "Everything Happens ..." and they both have sensitive ballad playing of the very best kind. The remaining three items not mentioned are absolutely not inferior; they have some of the best modern piano playing of 1954, and on this I take a global view! Thus we encounter with Shotaro Moriyasu a modern jazz pianist of much more than local quality but in fact of international dimensions! We can only speculate about what he might have accomplished if he had decided to live. Postscript of Nov. 8, 2017: Two more items (9 and 10 above) have appeared on Mocambo Session CDs. They confirm the impression and quality described earlier, a determined "... Moon" and a sensitive "... Valentine", which for some reason goes into medium tempo after the piano solo. Valuable discoveries!!

No further recording sessions.

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