

Natsuki Tamura

Trumpeter, Composer, Arranger

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"Imagine Don Cherry woke up one morning, found he'd joined an avant goth-rock band and was booked to score an Italian horror movie. It might be an unlikely scenario, but it goes some way to describing this magnificent sprawl of a record from Japanese trumpeter Natsuki Tamura... Hada Hada is a deeply compelling listen." - Peter Marsh, BBC

"Tamura shrewdly creates a sound world that while completely his own also hints at the mythological and musical folklore of Asian and European cultures.... a persona no less self-contained than that of early, wandering bluesmen like Robert Johnson or Charlie Patton." - Ken Waxman, Jazzweekly



photo by Toru Sasaki

Japanese trumpeter and composer NATSUKI TAMURA splits his active performing career between his homeland and the United States. Internationally recognized for his ability to blend a unique vocabulary of extended techniques with touching jazz lyricism, Tamura has been compared to players as diverse as Lester Bowie, Miles Davis, and Freddie Hubbard, with "chops that would make Louis Armstrong jealous." - Improvizazzation Nation.

His appearances at festivals worldwide include a solo trumpet performance at the 1998 Texaco New York Jazz Festival, as well as appearances at Newport Jazz in Madarao, Festival of New Trumpet Music at Tonic in NYC, San Francisco Jazz Festival, Frick Fine Arts Auditorium, Japan Jazz Aid, Yamaha Jazz Festival, Vancouver Jazz Festival, Yokohama Jazz, Yatsugatake Jazz, Kobe Jazz, Hibiya Jazz, Moers Festival in Germany, and the first annual San Francisco Alternative Music Festival. Club dates include the Knitting Factory and Tonic in New York; the Carnival Jazz Club, Babel 2nd, and Pit Inn in Tokyo; Bimhuis in Amsterdam, the Painted Bride in Philadelphia; and Airgin in Yokohama, among many others. In addition to performing with his own group, Tamura has performed with Satoko Fujii, Orkestrova, Jimmy Weinstein, Misha Mengelberg, and Angelo Verploegen, Larry Ochs, Chris Brown, and Ninh among many others.

Tamura first picked up the trumpet while performing in his junior high brass band. He began his professional music career after he graduated from high school, playing in numerous bands including the World Sharps Orchestra, Consolation, Skyliners Orchestra, New Herd Orchestra, Music Magic Orchestra, and the Satoko Fujii Ensemble, as well as in his own ensemble. He was the trumpeter for numerous national television shows in Japan from 1973-1982, including The Best Ten, Music Fair, Kirameku Rhythm and many others.

In 1986, he came to the United States to study at Berklee College of Music. He then returned to his native Japan to perform and teach at the Yamaha Popular Music School and at private trumpet studios in Tokyo and Saitama, before coming back to the US to study at the New England Conservatory of Music.

In 1990 Tamura led his quartet on Tobifudo, and in 1997 released *How Many?*, a duet with pianist Satoko Fujii. His stunning solo trumpet CD *A Song for Jyaki* (Leo Records, 1998) earned a Writers Choice 1998 in Coda magazine, and Rick Marx in Jazz Central Station hailed it as "A potent mix of passion and calculated madness, with Tamura's plaintive horn cry somewhere between a blast and a bleat. Tamura initiates a solo statement that is in the great tradition of original musical storytellers...his music magically captures the sounds of nature." And Andy Bartlett wrote in Coda: "A fabulous set of hiccupping leaps, drones and post-

bop trumpet hi-jinx. Tamura goes from growling lows to fluid, free solo runs and echoes not only Don Cherry's slurring anti-virtuosic chops but also Kenny Wheeler's piercing highwire fullness."

White & Blue, a duo album recorded in 2000 with drummers Jim Black and Aaron Alexander, made critics' Top 10 lists in Coda magazine and was lauded by S.D. Feeney in Face Magazine as "expressive journeys across sonic landscapes not found on most maps." "What is most striking is not simply the high level of interaction," wrote Stuart Broomer in Coda, "but the sense of sound as ceremony."

Tamura's collaborations with his wife, pianist Satoko Fujii, have garnered wide popular and critical acclaim, not only for his personal contributions but also for the intense musical empathy that exists between them. "Tamura and Fujii construct perfect little structures; their collaboration is balanced, astute, and very musical." "A lovely album," wrote Cadence magazine's Chris Kelsey, about their first duo album How Many? (Leo Records, 1997) Their 2002 duo release, Clouds, was greeted with equal praise and enthusiasm. "... the interplay is exquisite; Fujii and Tamura offer unsentimental beauty, space, silence and humour... Proof that improvised music can be emotionally engaging as well as ear tickling, Fujii and Tamura give us six clouds, all with a solid silver lining," said the BBC's Peter Marsh. "...a half-dozen beautiful compositions as protean and rarefied as their names imply. This is extremely beautiful music, defined by its intelligence and risk." wrote Jason Bivins in Cadence. In the Portland Press Herald, Steve Feeney described a duo performance during a 2002 U.S. tour as "Simply brilliant... Though their work has a fair amount of compositional structure, it consistently reveals a wide-open and unpredictable nature that makes its performance a thrilling ride for the listener." He was highly praised for his trumpet work on the 2003 release Minerva featuring Fujii and Tamura's Japanese Quartet. "Natsuki Tamura's trumpet has some of the stark, melancholy lyricism of Miles, the bristling rage of late 60s Freddie Hubbard and a dollop of the extended techniques of W. Leo Smith and Lester Bowie." - Mark Keresman, JazzReview.com. His 2003 Natsuki Tamura Quartet release Hada Hada was called "...a deeply compelling listen. Imagine Don Cherry woke up one morning, found he'd joined an avant goth-rock band and was booked to score an Italian horror movie. It might be an unlikely scenario, but it goes some way to describing this magnificent sprawl of a record from Japanese trumpeter Natsuki Tamura." - Peter Marsh, BBC. Tamura's 2004 Quartet release Exit is "...a brilliantly executed set with a neon glow." - Dan McClenaghan, All About Jazz. Tamura's second solo album, Ko Ko Ko Ke earned a Top CD of 2004 from Francois Couture and was praised as being "A highly serene, peaceful, intimate journey through the art of melody and play." - Francois Couture, All Music Guide.

Tamura is also featured in the Satoko Fujii NY Orchestra and her Japanese Big Band and has contributed original compositions and arrangements to each of their seven critically celebrated albums - South Wind, JO, Double Take, The Future of the Past, Before the Dawn, Blueprint and Nagoyanian. In addition, he's featured on Fujii's Quartet CD Zephyros, and Orkestra Rova's An Alligator in your Wallet.

Tamura toured extensively in 2005 and released two critically acclaimed discs as a leader, In the Tank, and Strange Village. The latter is the debut recording of his new acoustic quartet, Gato Libre, which features Satoko Fujii on accordion, Tsumura Kazuhiko, guitar, and Koreyasu Norikatsu on bass. Named one of the Top 10 CDs of 2005 by Randy McElligott of CHUO FM 89, it was described as "... a record of surprisingly soft and lyrical beauty that at times borders on flat-out impressionism," by Rick Anderson in Notes. Dennis Gonzalez of One Final Note observed, "Every so often a record comes along from an established artist that makes one reassess his or her accomplishments. The initial document from the Japanese quartet Gato Libre is such a release... Indeed, Strange Village is proof that Tamura and Fujii are truly multi-dimensional artists." In the Tank, listed as one of the Top 10 CDs for 2005 by All About Jazz, is in an altogether different vein. Hailed as a "triumphant electro-acoustic adventure" by Daniel Spicer of Jazzwise, it features two electric guitarists, Takayuki Kato and Elliott Sharp, (who also doubles on soprano sax), as well as Satoko Fujii on acoustic piano. "Think AMM meets blues guitar meets 1970s Miles Davis and you get some idea of the disc's flavor: a slow-moving panorama for the ears, where sounds are systematically added, repeated, refined, and replaced in turn," wrote Nate Dorward in Cadence. Tamura also appeared on two well-received releases with his wife Satoko Fujii in 2005: Live in Japan, 2004 and Angelona. This busy year also yielded Live at Moers with Satoh Masahiko and SAIFA.

As a composer, Tamura explores a wide range of material, from works based on traditional Japanese elements to his own distinctive pieces that incorporate contrasting episodes into surreal yet carefully balanced structures. In addition, Tamura has appeared on numerous Japanese recordings. He has recorded seven discs with the New Herd Orchestra, and has also been featured on recordings by the Juggernaut Big Band, and the Music Magic Orchestra.

Satoko Fujii

Pianist, Composer, Arranger

"Satoko Fujii is one of the more arresting new voices in jazz." — Stuart Broomer, Coda
"Unpredictable, wildly creative, and uncompromising...Fujii is an absolutely essential listen for anyone interested in the future of jazz." — Dan McClenaghan, All About Jazz



Critics and fans alike hail pianist and composer SATOKO FUJII as one of the most original new voices in jazz. A truly global artist, she splits her time between New York City and Japan and has toured internationally leading several different ensembles. Just as her career spans international borders, her music spans many genres, blending jazz, contemporary classical music, and traditional Japanese folk music into an innovative synthesis instantly recognizable as hers alone. "I would like to try many things with my compositions," she told Don Williamson in a

jazzreview.com interview. "I believe anything can be music ... sound colors are as important to me as the melody." Fujii's compositions are full of surprises with sudden shifts in direction and mood that challenge player and listener alike. Yet the extremes are always part of a greater conceptual whole, never mere exercises. The emotional demands are as great as the technical ones. She uses melodies as simple and straightforward as a folk song, as well as the harmonic sophistication of great jazz, and she can manipulate the extended forms of symphonic composers. As an improviser, Fujii is equally wide-ranging and virtuosic. In her solos, explosive free jazz energy mingles with delicate melodicism and a broad palette of timbre and textures. Her phrasing is clean and clear and delivered with a bright, nuanced touch that's equally indebted to her classical training and her jazz experience. She has showcased her astonishing range and ability on 25 CDs as leader or co-leader since 1996.

Born in 1958, Fujii began playing piano at age four and received classical training until age twenty. Realizing that the improvisation that had come so easily to her as a child was now very difficult, she decided to stop playing piano and began a band in which the members would sing and clap their hands to explore the origins of music. One year later, she changed her focus to jazz improvisation, returning to the piano. She was inspired by her teacher, Koji Taku, a classical pianist and composer who at 60 quit his job as chairman of the piano department at Tokyo College of Art and Music to play jazz. Fujii began private studies with another of her inspirations, the Japanese jazz pianist Fumio Itabashi, who performed with Elvin Jones and Ray Anderson. In order to pursue her own interest in jazz, Fujii left home because her parents wanted her to continue her classical studies at college. Once on her own, she struggled with the expense of renting a piano room and supporting herself.

Fujii first came to the United States in 1985 on a scholarship to Boston's Berklee College of Music, where her teachers included Herb Pomeroy and Bill Pierce. After graduating in 1987 magna cum laude with a Diploma of Professional Music, she returned to Japan where her experiences included everything from performing at leading jazz clubs in Tokyo and Yokohama and teaching at the Yamaha Popular Music School to a seven-year stint playing keyboards for

television and recording music for the JI software company. Among the Japanese groups she worked with are Tobifudo, and Teruaki Todo. She also worked with the AACM's Joseph Jarman & Douglas Ewart Ensemble. Fujii is featured on a 1990 release with Tobifudo.

In 1993, she returned to Boston, on a scholarship to New England Conservatory of Music, where her teachers included jazz greats George Russell, Cecil McBee and Paul Bley. After receiving her Graduate Diploma in Jazz Performance in 1996, Fujii's career really took off. Her NEC professor, free jazz innovator Paul Bley was featured on her debut CD *Something About Water* (Libra; 1996), a recording of improvised piano duets that "Combines two piano voices in subtle, quiet interplay. The music has a crystalline sparseness about it, the two players so intertwined it sounds almost like one voice. There is a floating lyricism to the music...like a delicate dance...sheer beauty." - Michael Rosenstein, *Cadence*. Her 1997 solo album *Indication* (Libra) was praised as a "brilliant collection of solo piano pieces." by Michael J. Williams of *American Reporter*.

In 1997 Fujii and her husband, trumpeter Natsuki Tamura, released the duo CD *How Many?* (Leo Lab). She and Tamura had met in 1984 when Fujii was 26 and the house pianist in a cabaret big band in Tokyo. They recognized each other as kindred spirits. "Our means of expression are very different," she said in her *jazzreview.com* interview, "but our musical values are the same. Natsuki and I both think we can derive inspiration from anything when we want to make music. For example, I play inside the piano as well as on the keyboard. Texture, color, timbre, pulse, rhythm, and harmony are equally picked up as elements forming the whole." Chris Kelsey of *Cadence* magazine wrote of their duet, "Together Tamura and Fujii construct perfect little structures; their collaboration is balanced, astute, and very musical. A lovely album."

In 1998, Fujii released albums by two of her most significant ongoing projects—a classic piano trio featuring bassist Mark Dresser and drummer Jim Black, and her large ensemble, which she founded in 1997. "Playing in a big band and playing in a piano trio are very different experiences," she told Williamson, "I don't want to put myself in a fixed position. That causes me to create a lot of formats." Her piano trio recording *Looking Out of the Window* (Nippon Crown) earned wide acclaim and was chosen as a Top 10 CD of the Year by both *Coda* and *Jazziz* magazines. The big band's debut, *South Wind* (Leo Lab), was equally praised as "an enormously successful orchestral debut... For those of you on the lookout for a state-of-the-art, end-of-the-millennium big band, it has arrived." - Michael Davis, *Option*. "What makes her special is her developing gift for blending composition and improvisation, as well as a progressive vision that sees no boundaries within tonality and no restrictions within the avant-garde." - Drew Wheeler, *Jazz Central Station*.

Her 1999 *Tzadik* release, *Kitsune-bi* served as a kind of summary of her small group composing and performing up to that point, showcasing her in duo with her long-time associate alto saxophonist Sachi Hayasaka, with her New York trio, and her critically acclaimed solo playing. "Satoko Fujii negotiates the path between Cecil Taylor's hyper-kinetic dissonance and more meditative styles of piano players like Randy Weston and Abdullah Ibrahim... Fujii transforms jazz into something architectural, full of designed shapes that jut and jab at the silence of an enclosed space...an intimate album, full of interior explorations and adventures." - Michael Kramer, *New York Times*. In addition, *Past Life* (Libra) featured Fujii's composing for a sextet of cutting edge Japanese jazz players.

The year 2000 brought the release of two orchestra CDs, *Jo* (Buzz) featuring her NY big band performing her "melodiously left-of-center compositions and those of her husband, Natsuki Tamura, with real verve...the lyrical edge of the players and the leaders' focused production make 'Jo' consistently involving." - *Billboard*. Then the Japanese label East Works released *Double Take* featuring Satoko's New York big band on one CD and her Japanese big band on another in a

fascinating juxtaposition. "I've had big band in New York and Tokyo for more than five years," Fujii said in her jazzreview.com interview, "and I have learned to appreciate how they are different. For example, my Japanese orchestra players are mostly free jazz players, and my New York orchestra players are mostly Downtown musicians. I think the Japanese free jazz players have a very strong influence from the '60s free jazz scene in American. They have a lot of energy, and when they play, they like to show that. Many times, their expression is very aggressive in a good way. New York Downtown musicians have strong influence from many kinds of music, like contemporary music, world, music, and jazz. Their expression is very diverse. They also have great energy in a different way." "Double Take seems like a musical future that's here already." - Stuart Broomer, Coda.

She also continuing exploring the potential of her explosive New York trio with their second album, *Toward, To West* (Enja) "Her most substantial and musically rewarding small group outing to date...Besides all of the purposeful soloing, sinuous flow and hard-edged musings, Ms. Fujii injects a potpourri of underlying themes and fluctuating cross-currents into her music...and perhaps the best is yet to come, as we watch her star rapidly ascend above the horizon! Highly recommended. ***** (out of 5)" - Glenn Astarita, *All About Jazz*.

The trio's fourth release, *Junction* (ewe records), was one of three 2001 albums that also saw the restlessly creative Fujii branching out in arresting new directions. *April Shower* (ewe Records), a duet with violinist Mark Feldman "marks another first-rate addition to the young pianist's growing discography.... striking a natural balance between tradition and experimentation, expectation and surprise" - Sam Prestiani, *Jazziz*. Then in the fall, came the radically different *Vulcan* (Libra Records), an avant-rock/free jazz fusion album featuring Takeharu Hayakawa, Tatsuya Yoshida, and Natsuki Tamura. *Vulcan* received wide, enthusiastic approval. "The sensibility here is aggressive to the point of primitive, with a raw, larger-than-life recorded presence for the drums and bass. The otherworldly vocal wailing that introduces "The Sun in a Moonlight Night" is both a warning and an invitation to the intriguing asymmetrical structures and virtuoso playing on this set." - Bill Bennett, *JazzTimes*. "*Vulcan* is choice work, a great showcase for the genius of jazz pianist Satoko Fujii... a masterpiece of jazz expression."

Fujii's second duo album with Tamura, *Clouds* (Libra), which earned high praise including spots on Coda's Top 10 CDs of the year list, was among four acclaimed CDs released in 2002. *Bell the Cat* (Tokuma Japan), the fifth release by her New York trio "is a beautifully played, sumptuously recorded tour-de-force filled with stunningly mature music making... As we approach the year 2003, this very much seems to encompass the shape of jazz to come." - David Prince, *CD Now*. It #5 in *Swing Journal's* 2002 Japanese Jazz Awards, Best of 2002 in *Jazz Weekly*, Best Piano Trio CD by Derk Richardson in the *San Francisco Gate*, and one of the Top 5 CDs of 2002 Masahiko Yu, *CD Journal*. Also released in 2002 was *Toh-kichi* (VICTO) a duo album with Fujii and Ruins drummer Tatsuya Yoshida recorded live at the Victoriaville Festival. "If you relish the prospect of an intense duo dialogue engaged with the sound of surprise, this concert performance is well worth checking out." - David Lewis, *Cadence*. *Minerva* (Libra/Jazzprint) another electrifying album by her quartet was selected as one of the Top 15 CDs of the year by Thomas Schulte, *Outsight* and hailed as "An awesome recording," by Andy Hamilton in *The Wire*. In addition to those CDs, 2002 was a busy year for touring, as well. Fujii toured the US with her Japanese quartet in April and May, performed with Tatsuya Yoshida at the Victoriaville Festival in May, performed with her Japanese orchestra at Yamaha Hamamatsu Jazz Festival in June, toured Japan with her quartet (Mark Dresser, Jim Black and Natsuki Tamura), was composer-in-residence and performer at the Rova Saxophone Quartet's 25th anniversary celebration *Rovate 2002* in San Francisco, and toured Europe with her Japanese Quartet.

2003 saw a similar range of activity, with the release of *The Future of the Past* (Enja), another CD with her NY Orchestra which has been called "awe-inspiring." - Ariake Tanabe, *musee*. Before the Dawn (Polystar) with her Japanese Big Band earned similar acclaim. "Each listen reveals new details in these pieces, though the energy and creativity of the playing grabs you from the outset. It's extremely vigorous and forward-thinking music at once. Don't miss out." - Jason Bivins, *Cadence*. *Zephyros* (Polystar/Not Two) came out at the end of 2003 and was selected as one of 2003's Top 5 Jazz CDs by *Music Magazine* and was also named a Top 10 CD in the *Village Voice*. In addition, Fujii performed with Tamura at the Vancouver Jazz Festival, and toured Europe with her Japanese Quartet.

2004 began with the release of *Erans* (Tzadik) another duo CD with drummer Tatsuya Yoshida, and a tour of the US in April that included a solo piano performance at the San Francisco Jazz Festival. She also toured Europe with OrkestraRova to support their CD *An Alligator in your Wallet* (EWE) on which she is featured, and Fujii received a Japanese Arts Council Grant for her Japanese performance with OrkestraRova and members of her Tokyo orchestra. Her first solo album in eight years, *Sketches* (Polystar) earned Top 10 status and is a "masterfully crafted album" - *New Music Box*. Her NY Trio's *Illusion Suite* (Libra) "is filled with thrill and joy of creation." - Hiraku Aoki, *Asahi* newspaper. 2004 also saw two Orchestra CDs: *Nagoyanian* (BAKAMO) with the Nagoya Orchestra, and *Blueprint* (Polystar) with her NY Orchestra: "A fearless blend of postmodern influences that range from contemporary classical music to free jazz... Fujii's writing liberates soloists..." - Mark Holston, *Jazziz*. 2004 also saw Fujii featured on CDs by the Itaru Oki Unit: *Itaru Oki Unit Live* (Polystar); Natsuki Tamura Quartet: *Exit* (Libra); and Gebhard Ullmann: *The Big Band Project* (Soul Note).

Fujii will also be touring in Europe, Canada and the US in the spring and summer of 2005, and will be featured on six new CDs: *In The Tank* (Libra) with Tamura and Elliot Sharp. They'll also perform at John Zorn's new club *The Stone* in April. Other upcoming CDs include a Trio + 1 CD *Live at Egg Farm*, Japan, featured accordion! player on Tamura's *Acoustic Quartet* CD, the fourth *Fujii Quartet* CD, a trio with the vocalist Koh and accordionist Ted Reichman, and *Junk Box* with Tamura and drummer John Hollenbeck. Fujii and Tamura are scheduled to play a double duo gig with Dutch pianist Misha Mengelberg and trumpeter Angelo Verploegen at Amsterdam's *Bimhuis* club in September 2005.

Fujii continues to explore, but not exhaust, the many groups she's established over the past nine years. And there is certainly more provocative and exciting listening in store as Fujii pursues her ultimate goals - "to allow myself to do whatever I like without preconceptions. I would love to make music that no one has heard before."