

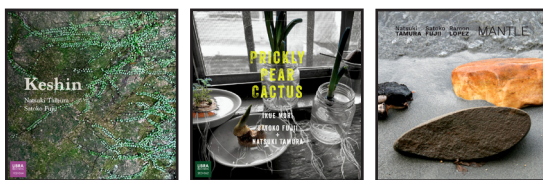
**MarksTown**  
**Steve Tintweiss and The Purple Why**  
 (INKY DoT MEDIA)  
 by Pierre Crépon

Quite rare in a field dominated by verbatim reissues, word of previously unheard music from avant garde jazz' early days is always noteworthy. This is doubly true when it constitutes the first entry in a band's discography, as is the case with The Purple Why. When he founded the group in 1967, bassist Steve Tintweiss had recorded as a sideman for ESP-Disk'. In 1970, he would contribute to what was to be Albert Ayler's final statement. This is the third release on the label Tintweiss created to issue material from his personal archives.

*MarksTown* contains two sets recorded in New York in the summer of 1968. The music is very much Tintweiss': he composes all the themes and bass holds a central position in the sonic balance, an uncommon trait in an era when the instrument often struggled just to be heard. Conversely, instead of focusing on sheer propulsive power, drummer Laurence Cook often plays accents encircling a space within which trumpeter James DuBoise and saxophonists Mark Whitecage—who passed away in March—and Trevor Koehler make measured contributions. The inclusion of vocalists Judy Stuart and Amy Sheffer adds another uncommon element to the group's lineups. With Tintweiss shouting short lines, vocals are a strong presence in the music, but they are used as devices in specific pieces, not unlike in certain contemporary music contexts.

The first set was part of a weeklong St. Mark's Church benefit for West African state Biafra where Joan Baez and Jimi Hendrix also appeared. In informative liner notes, Ben Young writes that Tintweiss opted to make the best of a last-minute time slot reduction by playing a medley of the band's repertoire. Rather than detracting from the music, the compactness of the set adds dynamic atmosphere changes. At Town Hall, on a bill shared with pianist Burton Greene—in whose band Tintweiss was a member—The Purple Why had more latitude to stretch out, giving way to solos that deserve close listening. The '60s avant garde produced more than what jazz-world structures could absorb at the time. *MarksTown* is recommended listening to anyone interested in probing the depths of that era's New York activity.

For more information, visit [spacelightband.com/discs.html](http://spacelightband.com/discs.html)



**Keshin**  
 Natsuki Tamura/Satoko Fujii (Libra)  
**Prickly Pear Cactus**  
 Ikue Mori/Satoko Fujii/Natsuki Tamura (Libra)  
**Mantle**  
 Natsuki Tamura/Satoko Fujii/Ramón López (Not Two)  
 by Steven Loewy

Satoko Fujii and Natsuki Tamura (who turns 70 this month), musical collaborators through the years, continued their massive and consistently remarkable output through the months of COVID. With more than a half-dozen recordings as a duo and many trio and larger group outings, the pianist/trumpeter team has

proved to be one of the most inventive and prolific in modern jazz. With her compositional skills and brilliant piano and his cocksure, fat-toned trumpet, the two perform with prescient alacrity, their playing almost merged as one. These three outstanding 2020 recordings, a duo and two trios, are superb examples of their recent work, giving a glimpse of diversified performance and wide palette of sound.

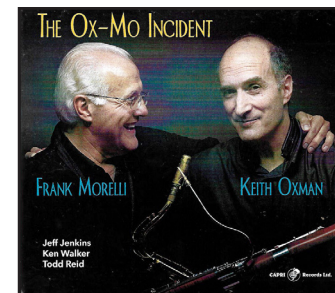
In some ways, *Keshin* represents the culmination of the Fujii/Tamura partnership. The pieces are accessible, mostly relaxed, often melodic, with brilliant use of space, changing tempos, alternately intense and soft-spoken solos and always the wondrous innocence of naked discovery. One enters, the other fades, then they play off one another and so forth, the results being an almost perfect display of duo performance. They submerge individual egos and, after performing so often together, anticipate each other's moves, filling the space with child-like wonder. There are moods galore, with "Dreamer" a good example of a stunningly gorgeous sound, opening slowly with piano, before trumpet enters and the two resist showmanship in favor of stellar beauty. The intimate, spellbinding conversations are never-ending, appearing as one sound. Fujii has built such a strong reputation as a composer and arranger it is easy to forget her enormous skill as a freestyle improviser. Similarly, Tamura, with an attractive rough sound, proves himself once again to be one of the great trumpet stylists. On "Three Scenes", he cries like a baby, with pinched notes juxtaposed against swooshes and faux farts, contrasted with innocent, simple and quiet piano lines; Fujii's solo encompasses a dense and meaty construction, with classical training in full display. The piece increases the velocity as Tamura immerses himself in a hardbop vein. The album is filled with riches, as opener "Busy Day" offers a tip-of-the-hat to Carla Bley as it conjures some of the workings of her classic and quirky *I Hate to Sing*, although without the slapstick. The results throughout *Keshin* are respite for the soul, as this lovely, thoughtful recording is sheer joy.

After a European tour and a recording session in New York in early 2020, Fujii, Tamura and electronicist Ikue Mori found themselves in the midst of the COVID crisis, unable to perform in public. Instead, they performed remotely, "switching" and "overdubbing" audio files after strategizing through Zoom, email and cell phone. The results on *Prickly Pear Cactus* are surprisingly upbeat, fresh and exciting, in part due to the way in which Mori weaves her wondrous electronics against flowing piano lines and rough, alluring brass. The recording is stunningly beautiful, with rolling piano statements boldly leading to pounding keys and whooshing splashes from trumpet. The focus is often on slow, in-depth pure sound and, although Fujii performs lovingly, she can erupt at any time, as she does effectively on "Guerrilla Rain", where Mori sets down an electronic tablecloth on which Fujii plates increasingly wild bursts of kinetic energy. Throughout, Fujii explores various timbre, moods, time signatures and tempo, with Mori always peeking through with deceptively simple, though disruptive, splashes, clanks and tinkles, tasteful yet surreptitiously subversive, while Tamura lets his presence be known with heavenly whispers and Fujii explores the full range of the keyboard, in and out. This is a splendid recording: enriching, sensitive, orchestral and just subversive enough to discomfit the uninitiated. Because of the continual changes and both the simplicity and complexity of the pieces, this *Prickly Pear Cactus* may sting, but its taste delights with a magnificent, stately and sweet sheen.

*Mantle* was recorded in 2019 after a short Japanese tour, with Spanish percussionist Ramón López added to the Fujii/Tamura mix, expanding the dynamics of the duo and opening them up. The highly attuned Lopez impresses with pleasantly surprising sensitivity

that lifts Tamura and Fujii in different directions. During their tour, each of the players took turns writing an original piece to perform each evening and they each selected three pieces for this recording. López' "Metaphors" opens with exquisite unaccompanied Tamura, whose unique style conjures the plump offerings of trumpeters Lester Bowie and even Henry "Red" Allen, but distinctively his own. When Fujii joins him, they are purely hand-in-glove, notes following notes as if magically perfectly placed. Tamura's "Encounter" is a tour de force, with Lopez featured in a long, sensitive, often riveting percussion solo, which energizes the trio, Fujii adding muscular block chords and Tamura bursting forward, seemingly from out of nowhere. Along the ride there are so many shifts in tempo, volume and sensitivity that the piece grabs and never lets go. Another standout, Tamura's intense "Came, Left", opens with delicate snares, leading to a simple trumpet dirge in the middle register, dancing over the drums and leading to a feverish Fujii showing wildly free chops, as trumpet and percussion intertwine with splendid abandon.

For more information, visit [librarecords.com](http://librarecords.com) and [nottwo.com](http://nottwo.com)



**The Ox-Mo Incident**  
 Frank Morelli/Keith Oxman (Capri)  
 by Marco Cangiano

The pairing of bassoon and tenor saxophone, if not a first, is certainly a rare event in jazz. While occasional incursions of classically-trained musicians into jazz territory are not new, the reverse is less frequent. This effort by chamber bassoonist/Juilliard alumnus Frank Morelli and hardbopping saxophonist Keith Oxman is, therefore, not only welcome but also refreshing. Morelli is a world-class player with an impressive resumé but this is his first outing into the jazz realm. The meeting was the outcome of a chance event, which saw Oxman's wife Susan, a bassoon specialist herself and a student of Morelli's, playing the role of *deus ex machina* and also writing the very insightful liner notes. The success of this CD goes largely to the band—pianist Jeff Jenkins, bassist Ken Walker and drummer Todd Reid—and the material, a mix of standards such as "The Surrey With the Fringe on Top" and "I Could Have Danced All Night" with Oxman originals, like the title track and "A Wasp in Search", and classic pieces like Fauré's "Pavanne", arranged by Morelli, and "Three for Five", based on Brahms' Symphony No. 3.

The most intriguing aspect of this album is the rediscovery of standards derived from themes of classical repertoire: "Baubles, Bangles and Beads"; based on a theme from Alexander Borodin's String Quartet, No. 2, it is executed in a bossa feel; "Poor Butterfly" is, not surprisingly, based on Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*; and "Full Moon" comes out of Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto, No. 5. All this may sound overly engineered, but the result is a date of unusual lightness and joyfulness, reminiscent of the sound of West Coast cool jazz of the late '50s and experiments à la Third Stream.

Bassoon is the star while tenor sounds a bit restrained. Whether this CD is a one-off event or the beginning of a new musical partnership one cannot say, but this reviewer is clearly rooting for the latter.

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