

# Ryuichi Sakamoto: async

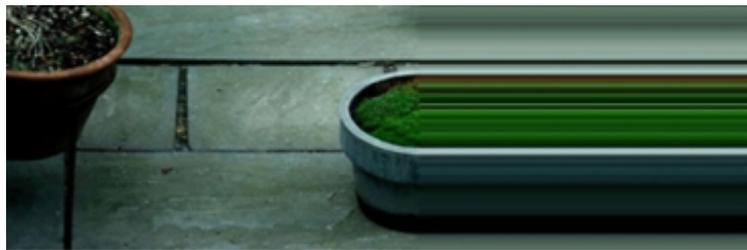
SC spectrumculture.com/2017/05/15/ryuichi-sakamoto-async/

Daniel Bromfield

3.5 / 5

5/15/2017

Ryuichi Sakamoto's first album after his recent cancer scare is mostly the composer alone, pensive, at his instruments. But two voices appear. The first comes from Paul Bowles, whose novel *The Sheltering Sky* was adapted into a film Sakamoto scored. "How many more times will you watch the full moon rise?" he asks. "Perhaps 20. And yet it all seems limitless." The second belongs to Sakamoto's longtime muse David Sylvian, instantly recognizable even while speaking. "Life is a wonder of wonders," he rhapsodizes, "and to wonder I dedicate myself on my knees like an orphan."



Ryuichi Sakamoto  
async

No doubt Sakamoto, composer of some of the most evocative music of any genre in the past half-century, has dedicated his life to wonder as well. At 65, he still approaches music-making with a childish delight. "tri" starts as a haze of wind chimes before Sakamoto digitally clips the sustain off each individual bell, leaving only the moments of impact so the crystalline sounds instead turn into irascible clanks. The piece isn't a statement or a sweeping mastery of musical form. It's about nothing but Sakamoto discovering he can make those sounds, and you can imagine his smile as he does.

*async* is a classic Sakamoto album, like *Smoochy* or *Chasm*, in that it sacrifices coherency and consistency in getting as many of its creator's ideas on wax as possible. Some of the ideas here are great, some are bad, most are interesting. A lot of the music here is pointless, especially the title track, which sounds like a bored stab at replicating a Jonny Greenwood score. But some of these pieces are so good they feel like entire albums in miniature – like "walker," an audio-poem that uses footsteps and the distant sound of wolves to suggest a walk deep in the woods, or "stakra," which creates spiraling orchids of sound out of a jokey electric piano setting Bruce Hornsby might use.

The tracks where he's seated at a synth tend to be more interesting than the ones where he fiddles with acoustic instruments. Fans of experimental music know what to expect from a piano or a cello, no matter how prepared it is, but synths are limitless, and Sakamoto's arsenal must be formidable. He likes pearly, crystalline sounds, as made clear on "solari," "ZURE," and "ff." He clearly also likes titles that sound like bits of data.

Many of these ideas must have gestated in Sakamoto's mind while he was infirm, so it's hard to blame him for squeezing so many of them into such a tight space. He tends to make his most consistent work with other artists anyway, including his wondrous albums with Sylvian and Alva Noto. Both partnerships are clearly still strong, and with the buzz around the score for *The Revenant* that brought the latter union, people will surely want to hear more from them. So even if *async* isn't the tightest album Sakamoto could have made, it confirms his music-making vigor is as strong, if not stronger, than ever – and that he's got enough great ideas that he could keep making classic music well into old age.

- Label:  
Milan
- Release Date:  
April 28, 2017

