

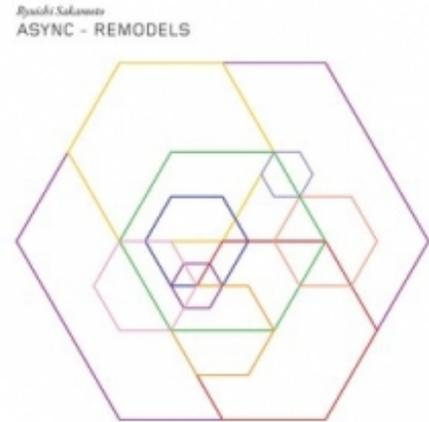
# Ryuichi Sakamoto: async remodels

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March 4, 2018

Ryuichi Sakamoto is sort of a Paul McCartney or Stevie Wonder for experimental electronic music, a happy-go-lucky, slightly-batty great-uncle whose work is essentially harmless even at its most esoteric. When faced with a prickly collaborator like Alva Noto or Christian Fennesz, his instinctive reaction is to offset their noise with placid piano. It's interesting to see how the tracks on last year's *async* fare in the hands of a cast of acolytes whose work largely adheres to the postmodern hellscape aesthetic prevalent in left-field electronic music. *async remodels* is as much a gritty reboot as a remix album, and though it's alluringly prickly, it sacrifices a lot of what makes *async* special, like its innocence and its bittersweet awareness of the transience of life.



Most of the 11 remixes—many of the same songs—add rather than subtract, demonstrating how a few small alterations can change a piece for better or worse. The remix most in line with Sakamoto's vision is Daniel Lopatin's take on "andata," which is more or less identical to the original until he puckishly turns up the reverb on a single piano note and lets his trademark sine-wave swell out of the depths of the mix. Not many producers are better at mechanized melancholy than Lopatin, and his hangdog synths work wonderfully with "andata"'s painfully plaintive piano motif. His strategy isn't dissimilar to Cornelius', whose "ZURE" remix augments the original with foley sound effects but feels too cartoonish to work with Sakamoto's sad synths.

It's interesting to see, on the more reductive remixes, what the producers choose to keep and leave out. For instance, "solari" is tackled twice, first by Motion Graphics (whose self-titled album from 2016 worshipped Sakamoto's influential, supremely goofy synthpop band Yellow Magic Orchestra) and then by "Stranger Things" maestros S U R V I V E. The only constant is the panning vocals, an assortment of koans about death in different languages, which Motion Graphics submerges in simian chatter and S U R V I V E sets over a foreboding drone. Crucially, Andy Stott's "Life, Life" chops the existential David Sylvian monologue "*To wonder I dedicate myself on my knees like an orphan*" and becomes less life-affirming and more what one might term death disco.

The best thing here by some measure is Yves Tumor's version of "ZURE," which adds a burst of guitar fireworks, possibly sampled from David Gilmour, and turns into a quiet-storm slow jam so gradually we barely realize it until a chopped-up vocal floats through the ether. Tumor was a

smart pick for this project, as his melancholic music pairs a knack for world-building with intense emotional fervor, just as *async* does. It's a radical transformation, but though it's darker than Sakamoto's vision, it taps into the same feelings. It's apt that Tumor's "Limerence" was the keystone of a great ambient compilation called *Mono No Aware* last year. *Mono no aware* is a Japanese term that can be translated as "an empathy towards things" or "a sensitivity to ephemera." It's an elusive quality, abundant on *async* but too often missing from its remodels.

- Label:
- Release Date: