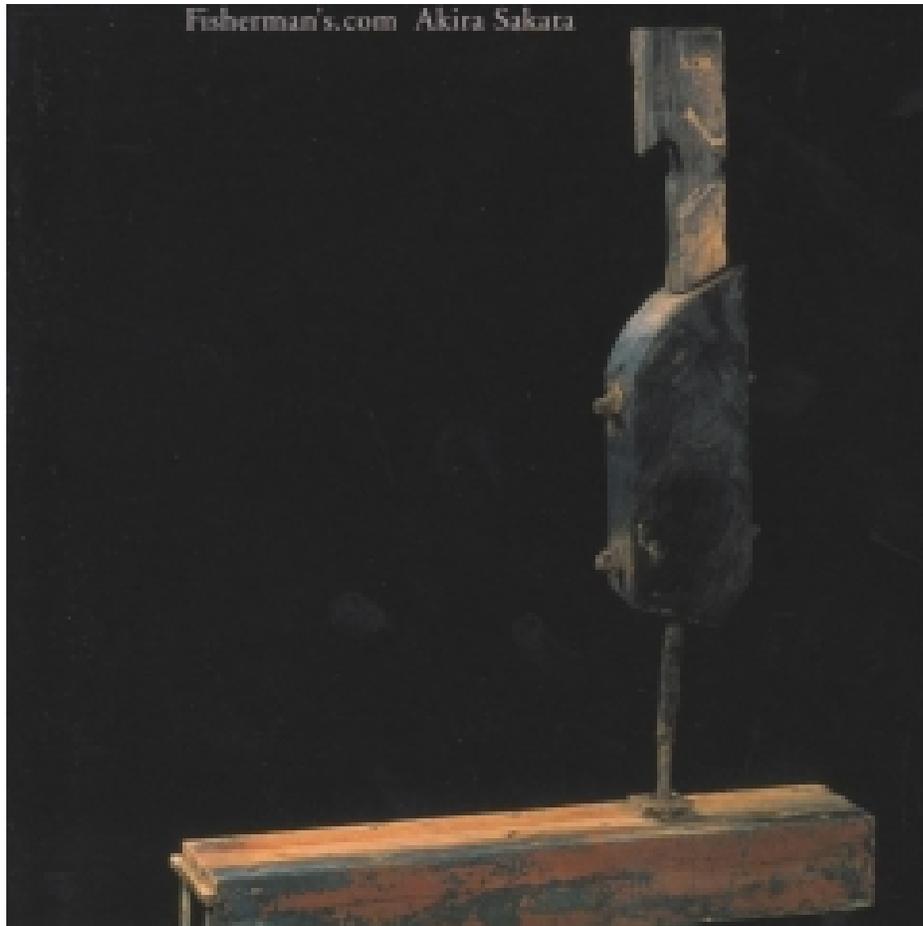


Akira Sakata: Fisherman's.com

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Akira Sakata's 2001 album *Fisherman's.com* can claim the historical footnote of being one of the last albums Pete Cosey, guitarist on four of Miles Davis's best '70s albums, ever played on—and his first appearance on record since no less than Herbie Hancock's *Future Shock*. This is not a man one calls casually. What was going through Sakata's head when he decided Cosey would be perfect for his album of Japanese fisherman's songs? For that matter, what was going through Cosey's head when he accepted? *Fisherman's.com* is a great piece of trivia but not an album that's heard much. A reissue on Trost Records makes clear it's one of the great dark funk records.

It's hard to think of many records that capture anything close to the violent psychedelic flux of Davis's work with Cosey *Dark Magus*, *Agharta*, *Pangaea* and *Get Up With It*, which aren't Davis's most beloved albums but are definitive as far as what he was doing in the '70s. *Fisherman's.com* comes closer than most, which is especially remarkable given that the production might elicit nods of approval from Lars Ulrich. Hamid Drake's drums are crisp and precise; Cosey's compressed to hell. It sounds for all intents and purposes like an album recorded in 2001. We pine for the analog warmth of a '70s album, but few records this clean sound so evil.

The songs on *Fisherman's.com* are innocuous sea shanties. Usually. In Sakata's hands, they're liquified and abstracted, melted into the very fabric of the ocean. Cosey's main job on the album is to slosh around in the mix, and it's hard not to think of waves. It shouldn't be a surprise that "Ondo no Funauta" concerns the navigation of a particularly treacherous strait. Fisherman's songs are work songs, sung to pass the time during difficult and boring stretches of menial labor, but from the comfort of the shore, Sakata has the luxury of a more psychedelic view. This music isn't really about being a fisherman but about the turbulence and unpredictability of the sea itself.

At times, the bandleader sounds like a speck on the waves. Sakata's alto playing, a little more melodious here than on the fire music he's better-known for, can seem a little cute for this kind of music. While Miles disappeared into the din of albums like *Dark Magus*, his trumpet only marginally different in function than any other instrument, Sakata is obviously the leader if only because he's the only one who's not playing the same thing for 10 minutes. He sings here, which he doesn't usually; his vocals ululate to the heavens while the rest of the band keeps things close to sea level. He's the figurehead of the ship, always in front but more ornamental than functional.

What makes *Fisherman's.com* effective, more than the contributions of Sakata or even Cosey, is just how well it works as funk. Funk is often cheapened to mean technically-proficient Muzak or anything that sounds like "Get Up (I Feel Like Being a) Sex Machine," not to mention post-*Shaft* baby-making clichés. At its best—Sly Stone's *There's a Riot Goin' On* Parliament-Funkadelic's early records, Prince's *The Black Album* and, of course, those '70s Miles albums—it can be truly frightening music that beguiles the brain while begging you to surrender to it. And if that sounds like an alluring experience, *Fisherman's.com* is waiting for you to take the plunge.