

Makoto Ozone – Makoto Ozone The Trio (1997)

Written by bluesever (Bogdan Marszałkowski)

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1 *The Beginning* 2 *Lazy Uncle* 3 *Fairy Dance* 4 *Esperanza* 5 *Home* 6 *Tea For Three* 7 *Stinger* 8 *My Old Book* 9 *A Happy Cat* 10 *Boon-Cha-Cha* Bass – Kiyoshi Kitagawa
Drums – Clarence Penn Guest [Special], Electric Guitar, Acoustic Guitar – John Scofield
(tracks: 2, 5, 7) Piano – Makoto Ozone

Makoto Ozone is an exceptional jazz pianist with prodigious technique, classical lyricism, and precise delicacy who often works with Gary Burton and recorded several fine albums for Columbia before switching to Verve. The Trio is an ideal introduction to his talents, which also include writing tuneful, lingering melodies and arranging them into an optimum mix of freedom and form. The ten Ozone originals here range from lively bop excursions ("The Beginning" and "Stinger") to thoughtful beauties like "Home," "My Old Book," and "Fairy Dance," a lovely waltz that builds higher as it sways. All are expertly rendered by this superb trio, with legendary guitarist John Scofield contributing extra texture and spice to three tracks: trading intricate twos with Ozone on the sly "Lazy Uncle," he brings his acoustic sensitivity to "Home," then later rocks out on Stinger. The showstopper is "Esperanza," an exciting fusion of Latin heat and Brazilian cool with sizzling solos by drummer Clarence Penn and bassist Kiyoshi Kitagawa. It's a varied sampling, thoughtfully assembled so that the passionate, free intensity of "Boon-Cha-Cha" is balanced by the playful antics of "A Happy Cat" and the swinging, smiling "Tea for Three." This CD gets more richly satisfying with each listen. Highly recommended. ---Judith Schlesinger

Back when Japanese pianist Makoto Ozone was attending Berklee, he was Gary Burton's prodigy and a frighteningly promising improviser. Ozone has an unusual ability to suggest odd traits of past masters – the muscularity of Ahmad Jamal, the happy romanticism of Bill Evans, the simplicity of the intricate Joanne Brackeen and, at times, the classic panache of Chick

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Corea – and weave them into a personable style.

Somewhere along the way, even though all these traits are still evident, he lost his ability to dazzle. He was recorded in Gary Burton's band — Real Life Hits (1984) and Whiz Kids (1986) — then recorded two moderately interesting albums for Columbia. He kind of disappeared from America for a while, releasing a series of discs for CBS / Sony and Verve in Japan, then finally resurfacing stateside on a duet disc with Gary Burton (Face to Face 1994). While he never really went away, The Trio is his first in the U.S. since 1985's After.

All in all, it's a nice, straight-ahead date that celebrates the simpatico between the 36-year-old pianist and his aggressively attuned partners: Kiyoshi Kitagwawa on bass and American Clarence Penn on drums (drummer with Cyrus Chestnut and David Sanchez). This is a beautifully integrated trio, and one of which Ozone is very proud (he says so in his notes). Kitagwawa, in particular, spurs Ozone to marvelous heights. The rapport between these two is reminiscent of other piano / bass partners of the past: Ahmad Jamal with Israel Crosby, Bill Evans and Scott LaFaro (and Eddie Gomez), Joanne Brackeen with Clint Houston (and Eddie Gomez) and Chick Corea with John Patitucci (and, ah, Eddie Gomez too). Welcome guest John Scofield adds his individual flourishes to three numbers — and Ozone pays him the complement of crafting melodies that are very much in the guitarist's strong compositional style ("Lazy Uncle," "Home" and "Stinger").

Unfortunately, as good as it is, The Trio isn't quite as memorable as it could have been. Ozone has an astute way of holding your attention while he expounds and explores. But, like much of his recordings before, when The Trio is finished, so has its impact. Despite crafting a refreshingly original program free of Monk renditions and Cole Porter variations, Ozone's compositions – little more than sketches brought to life with exceptional interaction – probably don't rate a full program. One can only hope this talented and intuitive group gets a hold of stronger material next time around. ---Douglas Payne, allaboutjazz.com

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