

Chihiro Yamanaka □ – Rosa (2020)

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1 *My Favorite Things* 3:34 2 *Falling Grace* 4:36 3 *Piano Sonata No.8 Third Movement* 5:16 4 *Donna Lee* 3:57 5 *Old Folks* 4:41 6 *Rosa* 4:14 7 *Take Love Easy* 4:22 8 *Symphony No. 5* 4:28 9 *Yardbird Suite* 5:16 10 *Someday Somewhere* 3:54 Bass – Yoshi Waki Drums – John Davis Guitar – Avi Rothbard Piano, Electric Piano [Fender Rhodes] – Chihiro Yamanaka

The delighted elan of Yamanaka's straightforward classic-jazz piano recalls Oscar Peterson and Mulgrew Miller

Since the heyday of Oscar Peterson, few pianists have either refined the technique or cultivated the desire to play straightforward classic jazz with the kind of showboating virtuosity that makes listeners doubt their senses. Chihiro Yamanaka, the prizewinning classically trained pianist from Japan (and a rising star in her adopted New York), is one of the world's most accomplished heirs to Peterson's legacy, and some have compared her effortless virtuosity and warmth to that of the late great Mulgrew Miller, too. She made a big impression at the Piano Trio festival at Ronnie Scott's last year, and returned this week with Dana Roth (bass guitar) and Karen Teperberg (drums).

Like Peterson, Yamanaka favours opening a song at a quiet, lounge-jazz sway and winding it up to a sprint just as listeners are settling back in their chairs. Her originals often sound like old Broadway hits, and an opener in that vein kept its cool long enough for Roth to purr through a dreamy bass solo before Yamanaka – fitfully standing as if to channel maximum force from her diminutive frame to the keyboard – took off in perfectly articulated treble runs and rapidly hammered chords. Teperberg, a direct and rugged drummer who sounds as if she's played as much rock as jazz, stayed in uncanny unison with Yamanaka's capricious twists and turns, whether sightreading the dots or anticipating the unexpected.

Another ballad-like intro switched to brief, stop-time outbursts and then cruising swing, while Yamanaka accented her shapely right-hand lines with thumping bass notes. She teased Für Elise (after apologising to Beethoven fans) into raggy swing-beats and quotes from Flight of the Bumblebee and bits of Thelonious Monk, played Monk's Evidence in stark, stripped-down chords on the Fender Rhodes for Roth and Teperberg to improvise around, and returned to overdrive on her own riffy, headlong Syncopation Hazard. It's an astonishing technical phenomenon more than a musical one, and it keeps jazz locked in the past – but Yamanaka does it with such delighted elan, it's hard to grumble for long. ---John Fordham, theguardian.com

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