

Stanley Clarke Trio | 10.05 | Minneapolis



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Stanley Clarke Trio :: 10.05.09 :: Dakota Jazz Club & Restaurant :: Minneapolis, MN

[Hiromi](#) is the future of jazz. A personification of youth, sex appeal, charisma, accessibility, femininity, humility and humor, the five-foot-nothing Amazon woman seems to exhibit everything that the connotation of jazz is not. This type of expectation defying excitement is just what jazz is lacking and needs more of. For her second appearance at the [Dakota](#) this year, this time with the [Return to Forever](#) rhythm section of [Stanley Clarke](#) and [Lenny White](#) (billed as the **Stanley Clarke Trio** in support of Clarke's 2009 *Jazz in the Garden* – see JamBase review [here](#)), Hiromi brought every aspect of her persona and musicianship to put on a master class that simultaneously created a cohesive musical statement and overshadowed her bandmates. In contrast to her primary influence, [Chick Corea](#), who appeared with the rhythm section the previous month (see the review [here](#)), Hiromi used her dynamism and chops not as an end in themselves, but as a mean to cultivate a transcendent musical impact that tore the house down.

The trio opened with a piece which made its live premiere at the venue the previous month, Clarke's "Three Wrong Notes." On the frantic swinger, Clarke and White allowed Hiromi out of the gate with a stream of machine gun lines and a vocabulary and cohesion of ideas that dwarfs players three times her age. While her solo was unbelievable in and of itself, her comping behind Clarke after her solo concluded was what cemented her reputation as a player. Unlike Corea in his performance the month before, Hiromi played very sparse and supportive lines behind Clarke's rapid fire solo, exhibiting a willingness and desire to not command the performance but to serve the music as a whole. Clarke set up a groove not unlike James Singleton's playing on Robert Walter's "Parts and Holes," and the group went into the traditional "Sakura Sakura." Again, the dynamic emotive range of the trio was on full display as Hiromi captured the spirit of maestros like McCoy Tyner and Ahmad Jamal in her chordal fragments and light-as-a-feather touch.



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The highlight of the night came next as the trio took on Chick Corea's "No Mystery." With dazzling unison lines, the piece was a dynamic roller coaster with an endless supply of energy and a sense of melody and counterpoint that transcended the original version. They garnered a standing ovation from many of the club's patrons (myself included). Hiromi stood with an enormous smile as Clarke took the microphone and facetiously talked about the history of the song. "That was one of the easier pieces of the night. Lenny and I were on the original recording some time back in the 1800's," Clarke said provoking a laugh from the audience. "We still look good though."

The band then took on two unannounced ballads. The first was a melancholy tone poem that found Clarke drawing his bow while Hiromi conjured up rainy day soundscapes and ethereal colors on her instrument. The second ballad would be hard to chart as it started chipper, sounded like a standard piece and proceeded to deconstruct into an improvised excursion into the unexpected. The group then took on Lenny White's "Paradigm Shift," where the drummer took a solo between Hiromi's playful and quirky melodies and accelerated,

sixteenth note triplets. After retreating to a standing ovation, the trio returned in triumph to take on the Red Hot Chili Peppers' "Under the Bridge." On the reharmonized tune, Clarke picked up his acoustic bass guitar and plunked out the melody as Hiromi repainted the harmonic climate before launching head first (no pun intended) into a head banging, thundering thrash solo that had her looking more like a Muppet than a piano virtuoso. After revisiting the melody, the trio bowed and returned to the green room in triumph.

The only drawback of Clarke's new trio was the same downfall present when Corea occupied the piano bench. Rath

play as a unison machine greater than the sum of its parts, White and Clarke are more content to play sparsely behind Hiromi as she burns up the keys. While Hiromi's musical maturity and execution in the lineup showed greater acuity than forefather Corea, it would be refreshing to see the unit function as more of a singular entity. That said, Hiromi's playing is worth the price of admission all by itself. It is hard to overstate her musicality or importance to the future of jazz. Who might try to dismiss her playing as overbearing in the technique department, ignoring her sensitivity to the musical situation at hand would be to court ignorance, at best. And for any lingering doubts (if there were any to begin with) about her ability to play straight ahead acoustic jazz, her delivery as a side woman (or frontwoman, depending on how you care to look at it) to one of jazz's most potent rhythm sections quickly dispatches any such ridiculous notion. If the Minneapolis show was any indication, the upcoming dates are sure to be some of the best shows of the year.

Hiromi tour dates available [here](#).

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