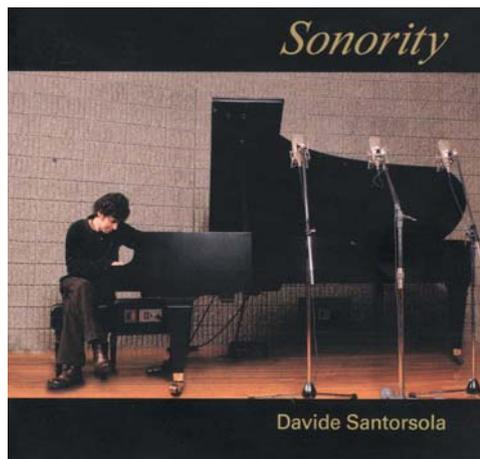


Daive Santorsola *Sonority*

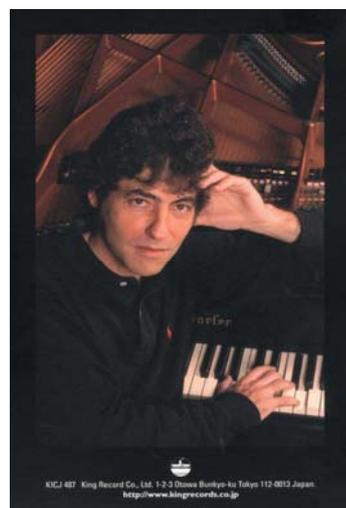
(solo piano – Bosendorfer model 275) - King Records - Paddle Wheel, Tokyo, KICJ 487 CD

In jazz piano, I am fully aware that “sonority” is not an issue that should be given top priority. Up to the late 1950s in particular, sound was the most neglected of all piano expression techniques. For both players and listeners of jazz piano, more important than how sound reverberates is how the notes move. While the emergence of **Bill Evans** changed this situation quite dramatically, sound still failed to gain currency as a principle means of jazz expression. However beautiful the sound of Keith Jarrett might be, the sound in his music was nothing more than a companion to its “movement.” No one would argue for sound alone, and if they did, such argument would likely be dismissed as nothing more than nonsense. That’s right. In music, it’s considered silly to blabber on about such a simple physical phenomenon as sound. Even so, we know of artists who have pursued sound to the outer boundaries, and who have taken sound to the point where it can no longer be dismissed as a form of musical expression. Artists such as **Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli**. Or **Maurizio Pollini**. Or **Ivo Pogorelich**. These classical pianists have captured sound in a such a versatile manner that they are able to produce sounds which we have never heard before from the piano, an



instrument from which anyone should be able to produce the same sounds, and have turned it into an element that can be said to have become the core of their expression. And this technique has furthermore come to occupy a significant corner of classical piano music expression. Why hasn’t this form of expression emerged in jazz? Certainly it’s natural that the level of preoccupation with sound in jazz differs from that in classical piano, where the music to be played is determined beforehand, whereas in jazz, more emphasis is placed on the quality of improvisation. For jazz pianists engrossed in what notes to play next, there’s no question that it it’s no easy task to additionally concentrate on “how to produce sound.” **However, precisely owing to the difficulty of this task, if this could indeed be accomplished, would it not result in the emergence of completely new expressive possibilities for jazz piano? Such possibilities, for example, that are found in the music of Davide Santorsola.**

I first heard the name Santorsola and his performance in Kiyoto Fujiwara’s 2004 release *Mattinata*. While listening to this work for a jazz magazine review, my ear was drawn to Santorsola’s piano more so than the album’s feature performer, Fujiwara. Particularly, the beauty of that pianissimo. And the richness of the harmonies. In my review, I wrote “a completely filtered, pure sound.” However, upon listening to it again, I realize that I was mistaken, because the beauty of Santorsola’s sound is more natural than it is man-made. While marveling at the beauty of the sound, I also wrote, “Being so preoccupied with the sound, the weakness is that the music loses its energy. If I had to listen to it as a solo, while at first I might



be entranced, I might soon become bored.” As I commented earlier, it is indeed no small task to balance sound with the movement of notes (for instance, in Michelangeli’s later years, he prioritized sound so much, that his playing tempo started to lag far behind conventional meter. In *Mattinata*, at least, I feel even now that the dynamic of the music was provided by the bass of Fujiwara and drums of Fukuya. These sentiments most likely not reached the ears of Santorsola, and this new work is comprised entirely of solo piano performances. So, was I bored or not....?

The first thing to capture the attention upon listening is, as expected, the distinct sound of the piano. According to sources, on both this new work and on *Mattinata*, Santorsola used an unconventionally tuned piano. This technique is said to be quite



difficult. According to Santorsola, this tuning method “broadens the acoustic field, and enriches the sound of the piano and emotion of the music” (to my admittedly amateur ears, **I was impressed upon listening by the beauty of the high harmonics and the flamboyant sound**). Of course, even when using such a tuning, if the playing doesn’t suit it, the effect will be nil. What makes Santorsola’s music sound so special is that he plays in a way that fully utilizes the sound he obtains from this tuning. This becomes evident right away on the album’s opening song, “**Body and Soul**”. The arpeggio is like a clear stream that brings to mind Debussy or Ravel. Followed by the mirage-like theme that rises to the surface. From this refreshing beginning, you get **the sense of Santorsola’s extraordinary intent on creating a new form of jazz piano expression.**

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The following piece, “Lush Life,” is similar. Particular, the novel experimentation of the harmony in the verse. I’ve never heard such a jazz standard, in which each note in the melody is supported by a harmony with such a high degree of tension. An snippet in the later half of the song is reminiscent of Bill Evans’ “Peace Piece” (one of the numbers among his works in which he produced his most radical harmonies). In the opening minute of the fourth song, “Seascape,” a timeless Evans piece, Santorsola makes maximum use of his unique piano tuning. Lightly played phrase fragments which at a glance appear to have no meaning. However, I’d like you to turn up the volume and listen. You should become aware of a mysterious afterglow suspended between each note. I’m just imagining here, but it seems like Santorsola is suppressing the chords at the bass register (so that they don’t ring). By doing this, when playing keys in the middle and high registers, a resonance occurs within the body, resulting in high harmonics. With a normal tuning, there will be variations in the high harmonics, but how beautiful they are here! Such playing could only be achieved by one well-versed in the structure and sound of the piano. Writing in this way, there may be people who will think that Santorsola is a pianist who does nothing more than indulge himself in the sound he produces on the piano. However, there is of course far more to this artist. For the purpose of expressive desire, **he also possesses the courage to daringly exploit the beauty of sound.** The most visible example of this is in the first half of “Green Dolphin Street.” This song, in which a disquieting phrase is spun over the same repeating sound pattern, brings to mind Brad Mehldau and Esbjörn Svensson, two of the most brilliant modern pianists. “Alone Together” and “Stella by Starlight” also come close to this track in showing that Santorsola the pianist also possesses a keen sensitivity toward “the movement of sound.” This album is more weighted toward sound than vibrancy. However, if you seriously focus on the sound, there is no room whatsoever to grow bored. While paying attention to the movement of each note, and contemplating how the sound occurs along with this movement, **I ended up listening to this CD almost 20 times. For people such as myself, the incomprehensible mystery of the sound lay hidden.** In recent years, there has been a boom in “Euro jazz,” and while it’s true that this is has been a boon for the jazz world, **Santorsola stands somewhat apart from this trend, or should I say, he’s a pianist that should stand apart.** To say more, **I think that there is a part of him that falls outside the category of “jazz”.**



Sonority liner notes **Fumiaki Fujimoto**

NEW INFLUENTIAL JAZZ PIANO IN EURO

Hiroki Sugita Interview Sommary, Swing Journal, Tokyo, July 2005 issue

Dear Mr. Daive Santorsola, I want to ask you some questions.

Hear that you studied piano for yourself until 18 years old. Who were your favorite musicians in those years?

I’ve listened to different kinds of musical genres: rock, pop, and classical with much interest. But, it was jazz that really captured and involved me. In particular, Bebop really influenced my life. I spent many pleasurable hours imitating tracks of Bill Evans, Art Tatum, Herbie Hancock, Keith Jarrett, Charlie Parker, Stan Getz, Oscar Peterson and Ella Fitzgerald, but also the interpretations of Glenn Gould, Maurizio Pollini, Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli, and many other artists. One of my favorite pastimes was to recreate their sound, and spend time moving from one atmosphere to another.

You studied with Enrico Pieranunzi and Franco D’Andrea, played with Phil Woods And Lee Konitz, and started your Trio in 1985. How did you get your own voice on the piano?

Yes, it’s true! I’ve been fortunate to play with lots of musicians. Beyond the greats such as Phil Woods and Lee Konitz, there was also Benny Golson, David Liebmann, etc. Playing with each one of them has been a great lesson for me. I have always tried to adapt myself to the soloists, looking for the right sound for each situation without imposing my preconceived ideas on them. I studied a lot to try to be as adaptable as possible without hiding my personality and my instinct.

Coincidentally your two albums will be released here in June. “Sonority” is a solo piano album. Please let us know the conception of the album. What do you think is the important element in playing the solo album?

“Sonority” was my first album entirely piano solo. I always regarded recording a piano solo album as a huge undertaking. And, without doubt, the most difficult feat for a pianist. I

thank Mr. Susumu Morikawa so much for the climate of trust and calmness during the recording of ‘Sonority.’ I hold that the most fascinating challenge in doing a ‘piano solo’ album is to express yourself while being able to use a variety of timbres and sounds. Certainly, the privilege of playing the piano is that of managing harmony, melody, and rhythm contextually, and yet, my effort is that of giving final form through the possibility of sound, with rigor, fundamentals, and method. This is only possible when you can perform music in solitude without conditions or suggestions.

Most of the songs are well known Standards. When you play Standard songs, how do you express your originality?

Standards are the meeting point between the musician and the listener, almost a pretext to demonstrate clearly his own logic, thoughts and emotion. And besides, they are tradition....Any form of improvisation, if sincere, is always original and unreplaceable.

“Rhythm and Changes” consists of Standards and your originals. What do you think is the most important thing in composing music?

Being natural and not falling into banality, artificiality, or complacency. Even the most difficult and articulate compositions have to be, at the end, flowing, natural, and coherent.

What do you think is the fascination with the piano trio?

The piano trio is a small, organic and perfect mechanism. It provides maximum organization (as in a big band) but at the same time, it is full of freedom to change ideas, moving towards unexpected and surprising paths.

Hiroki Sugita