



Archipelago X
Ikue Mori/Brian Marsella/Sae Hashimoto (Tzadik)
by John Pietaro

Ikue Mori holds legendary status as a founding party of the no wave school. Her throbbing, almost tribal rhythms across a drumkit in Arto Lindsay's band DNA led her into the heart of New York's underground in 1977, on to collaborations with Downtown avant garde royalty. Over the years, her focus transferred from drums to drum machines and finally to laptop electronics, where she has collaborated with myriad global sound and performance artists, focusing on the atmospheric, but her percussive roots crank out varying levels of sonorities, cross-rhythms and shifting timbre.

While all members of various John Zorn ensembles, the self-taught Mori is of the underground while her bandmates are trained contemporary classical musicians with a penchant for improvisation and a wide palette for variety. Pianist Brian Marsella doubles on Fender Rhodes but also Mellotron, clavinet, zither and a plethora of sequencers, effects and analog synthesizers. Percussionist Sae Hashimoto is ensconced in a veritable funhouse of mallet instruments, an array of drums and metals and small percussives, standard and homemade. Listening to her effortlessly glide from things idiophonic (vibraphone, marimba, crotales, pitched and unpitched gongs, maracas, waterphone, balafon, shakers, bells, chimes, woodblock, cajon) and membranophonic (snare drum, concert toms, bass drum, frame drum, bongos), as in "Satellites Are Spinning", is something of a revelation. In a field of shimmering sound, the percussion boldly captures the ear and then retreats further back with washy gongs and silvery chimes. "Lapis Lazuli" too features crystal-clear sticking before the sonorities shift into a thicket, held, embellished upon, reactivated and sent back out by Mori. A high point, however, is closer "Through the Mist", its imagery of walking a fog-blinded coast by night, complete with the sounds of buoys, dark waters, a lighthouse bell, warns as acoustic piano (with just enough reverb) paints an ominous but not hopeless forecast. Left-hand diminished chords and roaming high-end dissonances carry such rare beauty that listeners may recall Paul Hindemith.

Still, this ensemble is a true collective, creating not only unified music but also a unified, organic tapestry. Very much as its name implies, this Archipelago is comprised of individuals standing as one. The beautiful irony is that this album was recorded remotely during the 2020 lockdown.

For more information, visit tzadik.com. Mori is at The Stone Jan. 21st. Marsella is at The Jazz Gallery Jan. 15th as part of Winter Jazzfest. See Calendar.