

# NEW YORK MUSIC DAILY

## A Radical Japanese Firestorm Back in Print After Forty-Five Years

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On September 5, 1975 guitarist Masayuki Takayanagi's New Direction Unit played a marathon concert at Yasuda Seimei Hall in Tokyo's Shinjuku district. Any kind of jazz beyond traditional swing was considered radical and frowned on by the authorities at the time – and by pretty much any standard, this is utterly fearless, often completely unhinged music. The performance was eventually immortalized on two albums, but never in the exact order of the setlist, such that there was a setlist. Finally, this landmark performance of transgressive improvisation has been reissued just as it was played, titled *Axis/Another Revolvable Thing*, streaming at Bandcamp courtesy of the folks at Blank Forms.

The first album comprises just three tracks: two group improvisations and a drum solo, none of which offer any idea of the carnage to come later. The conversational rapport between the players is obvious as the thicket of staccato in the opening segment coalesces in a flash: Takayanagi joined by Kenji Mori on flutes and bass clarinet, Nobuyoshi Ino alternating between bass and cello and Hiroshi Yamazaki on drums. This is a jungle, a brisk worker ants' round-robin of short exchanges, extended flurries and jaunty echo effects punctuated by Mori's leaping flute. Takayanagi plays without a hint of effects, mostly cello-like pizzicato, never really approximating any kind of traditional melody. It's as playful as it is purposeful. Gabor Szabo in especially terse mode comes to mind. No wonder the band saw fit to release it.

Devious poltergeist accents and coy humor pervade the second improvisation amid lots of space. The colorful drum solo is basically a synopsis of what's happened up to this point, and as quickly becomes clear, Yamazaki has tuned his kit to continue a couple of simple, catchy two-note themes from the previous piece. Drama and suspense prevail, no small achievement.

The second disc is where the inferno starts, both Takayanagi and Nobuyoshi conjuring evil sheets of feedback, often receding back to a Shinto temple of the mind for minutes on end. It's basically the shadow side of the first record, with toxic white noise from Takayanagi's wah pedal, Yamazaki walking a tightrope expertly between mystery and mayhem. Ironically, Mori, the adventurous sprite of the first album, holds the center blithely as all hell breaks loose around him. Finally, he breaks free with one shriek after another. The feral 23-minute coda is to die for, if you like this kind of noise.

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