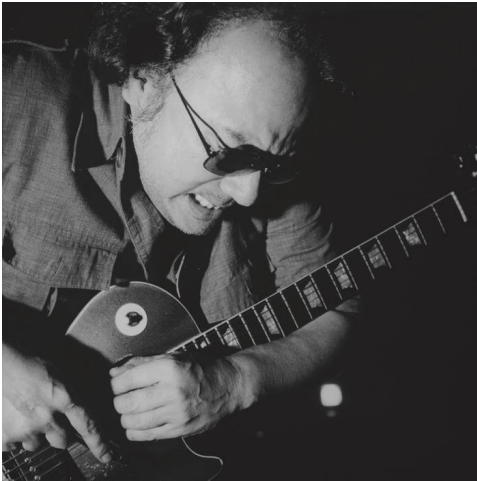


Album of the Day:

Masayuki Takayanagi New Direction Unit, “April Is the Cruellest Month”

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By David Menestres



Masayuki Takayanagi is a legend of Japanese guitar. Beginning as a straight-ahead jazzier in the late 1950s, he eventually turned his attention to destroying those traditions, emerging as a deeply original guitarist on par with Keith Rowe, Derek Bailey, and Jimi Hendrix. His influence can be felt in the music of similar structure-breakers like Keiji Haino, The Boredoms, Jim O'Rourke, and Weasel Walter, to name a few.

Takayanagi's classic *April is the Cruellest Month*, which has just been reissued by the NY-based label Blank Forms, was originally recorded in 1975 and slated for release on the influential ESP-Disk', but the label imploded before *April's* release. (It was eventually released on CD in Japan in 1991.) The album features one of Takayanagi's most fearless groups, the New Direction Unit, and the music it contains is unapologetically fierce and monumental. The B-side, “My Friend, Blood Shaking My Heart,” is one long dose of the kind of medicine that might kill you before it makes you better—a screaming, squalling fire storm of sound that races across the earth and lays waste to everything in its path.

Which is not to say the album is without moments of beauty; Kengi Mori's bass clarinet on “What Have We Given?” sits above Nobuyoshi Ino's bass and the thrashing, trashy cymbals of Hiroshi Yamazaki's percussion arsenal. On opening track “We Have Existed,” Mori's flute takes determined leaps over Ino's brisk cello lines, both of which evolve against and into the smoldering flames of Takayanagi's guitar.

When someone asked Takayanagi about *April's* failure to be released as planned, he replied simply “these things happen.” Forty-four years after it was created, *April* still sounds fierce and futuristic. One can only wonder what might have happened to music had it been released in the mid '70s.

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