

# Point of Departure

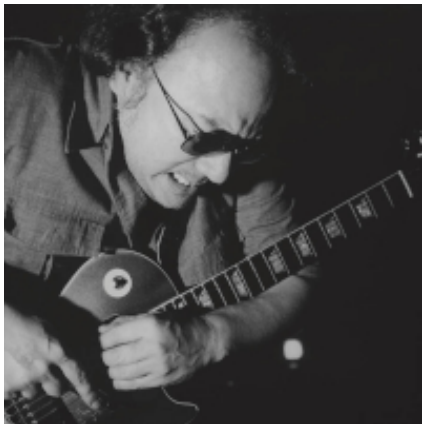
an online music journal

## Moment's Notice: Reviews of Recent Recordings

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By Jason Bivins

Masayuki Takayanagi New Direction Unit – *April is the Cruellest Month*



Let's get this out of the way. If you've never heard this lost classic of Japanese free jazz/noise/guitar freakery, just get it. If you're one of its devotees, you probably have some bootleg CD-R that you've obsessed over for a couple of decades, since the early 1990s Japanese issue of the 1975 monster that ESP had originally intended to release.

The famous photograph of the shades-wearing leader attacking his Les Paul seems radically at odds with his early devotion to Tristano and cool jazz. By the end of the 1960s, though, Takayanagi was a devotee of feedback and furious shredding. Joined here by Kenji Mori (alto, flute, and bass clarinet), bassist/cellist Nobuyoshi Ino, and percussionist Hiroshi Yamazaki, *April* takes in a wide range of sound. Opener "We Have Existed" is extremely focused and filled with tension. This is no howl, no blowout, but an understated exploration of noise at the edges. Mori's flute is quite tasty, and Yamazaki's pattering drums only hint at pulse. But with Ino and Takayanagi, there is gruff scratching, choked strings, and an insistent mewling or crying, like something pleading for release. "What Have We Given?" is another study in sonic exploration, muted and actually quite subtle. The sound of delicate chains and bells contrasts with a single, held feedback note. Burbling bass clarinet rides over splashing cymbals, all like a great waterfall. And indeed there is something powerfully elemental to this music, a great force rolling over the musicians. The group has great instincts, playing fairly sparingly, changing registers and dynamics throughout, at times sounding like some lost SME session. But in the final minutes of the piece, things get rather gnarly, as Ino attacks his bass with percussive force, producing some fierce overtones, while Takayanagi coaxes some huge clanging bell noises from his guitar.

The second side of the LP, "My Friend, Blood Shaking My Heart," just roars into life, an unrelenting 20-minute study in ferocity and conviction. It is, quite simply, the explosion of everything the first two tracks merely hinted at. A sustained letting-loose. Mori plays with the kind of acetylene ferocity of sometime Takayanagi associate Kaoru Abe, while Yamazaki overwhelms in the way Weasel Walter and Chris Corsano sometimes do in our era. But the mad dance at this piece's heart is between Ino's coiling strings and Takayanagi's titanic, overwhelming guitar. He is a hurricane of wah and sizzling, oversaturated distortion. He plays sparks more than notes. He unleashes huge sliding chords or spitfire runs, with feedback the context, not just an idea. In its final minutes, crashing drums, wailing sax and strings, it achieves that unique liftoff that only this kind of music can. An absolute triumph.

<http://pointofdeparture.org/archives/PoD-68/PoD68MoreMoments5.html>