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NEWS RELEASE

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Pianist-Composer Satoko Fujii and Mallet Virtuoso Taiko Saito Debut New Duo on Intimate New Album, *Beyond*

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“Persistent and inexhaustible imagination with emotion, power and everything else...[Fujii] does not leave a single second to be bored or indifferent.” – Phontas Troussas, [Vinylmine](#)

“Taiko not only displayed exceptional technique, but more importantly she projected her own voice on an instrument that dares one to uncover . . . even more impressive was her daring to dive in some uncharted waters which she glided through with ease.”—Mike Mainieri, vibraphonist

Beyond (Libra, January 22, 2021), the recorded debut of **Futari**, a duo of pianist-composer **Satoko Fujii** and vibraphonist **Taiko Saito**, features lyrical intensity from two fearless explorers of new sounds. The combination of piano and vibes is an uncommon one, but Fujii and Saito navigate the new terrain of their collaboration with imagination and a spirit of adventure. “I think we both were looking to get a special something from the piano-vibraphone duo,” Fujii says. “I mean, these instruments are so much alike and it’s not easy for them to play together.”

Futari (which means “two people” in Japanese) has been 15 years in the making. Fujii and Saito first met when Fujii was performing in Berlin and Saito was still a student at the Universität der Künste Berlin. They stayed in touch and a friendship grew between them. While Fujii and her husband, trumpeter Natuski Tamura, moved to Berlin for a few years in 2011, Saito helped them adjust to their new home, but Fujii’s busy touring schedule meant they never got a chance to play. Finally, in 2017, they performed together in Puzzle, a quartet featuring percussive dancer Mizuki Wildenhahn. Saito suggested a duo tour of Japan in June 2019 while she was also home visiting family. Just after the fourth concert of the tour, they recorded *Beyond*.

The album is thoughtful and full of quiet sonic surprises. “I don’t want any limits to how I express myself,” Fujii says. “Many people think I play very aggressively. I can be aggressive but I also love playing very quiet. We actually recorded some aggressive pieces, but we ended up using the quiet ones for the album because we loved the feeling.”

“In Europe there are so many musicians who explore sound by extended technique,” Fujii continues, “I think much more than in America and Japan. I started playing these things before I moved to Berlin, but I have to say during my Berlin days, I became more influenced by these sounds. Taiko and I didn’t talk about these things at all before we played, but the vocabulary is a big part of the way we each express ourselves.”

Fujii and Saito devote much of their improvising to shaping poignant melodic phrases and abstract sounds into haunting, atmospheric performances. For instance, “Molecular” blends a halo of sustained vibraphone tones, percussive prepared piano rattles, and short melodies into an evocative

whole. On “Todokanai Tegami,” overtones from bowed vibraphone keys and prepared piano strings tint in the air with subtle tone colors as music-box like lines thread their way through the sonic cloud. “Mobius Loop” begins with soft, ethereal strumming inside the piano peppered with sharp percussive vibraphone sounds and moves on to vibraphone lines gently burbling over piano chords before climaxing with some dynamic linear interplay. Other tracks, such as “The Road” and “Mizube” feature more conventional interaction between the two instrumentalists. On every track, no matter the approach, there’s an engaging sense that Fujii and Saito are enjoying the process of discovering what kind of music they can make together.

Critics and fans alike hail pianist and composer **Satoko Fujii** as one of the most original voices in jazz today. She’s “*a virtuoso piano improviser, an original composer and a bandleader who gets the best collaborators to deliver,*” says John Fordham in The Guardian. In concert and on nearly 100 albums as a leader or co-leader, she synthesizes jazz, contemporary classical, avant-rock, and folk musics into an innovative style instantly recognizable as hers alone. A prolific band leader and recording artist, she celebrated her 60th birthday in 2018 by releasing one album a month from bands old and new, from solo to large ensemble. Franz A. Matzner in All About Jazz likened the twelve albums to “*an ecosystem of independently thriving organisms linked by the shared soil of Fujii’s artistic heritage and shaped by the forces of her creativity.*”

Over the years, Fujii has led some of the most consistently creative ensembles in modern improvised music, including her trio with bassist Mark Dresser and drummer Jim Black and an electrifying avant-rock quartet featuring drummer Tatsuya Yoshida of The Ruins. Her ongoing duet project with husband Natsuki Tamura released their sixth recording, *Kisaragi*, in 2017. “*The duo’s commitment to producing new sounds based on fresh ideas is second only to their musicianship,*” says Karl Ackermann in All About Jazz. *Aspiration*, a CD by an ad hoc quartet featuring Wadada Leo Smith, Tamura, and Ikue Mori, was released in 2017 to wide acclaim. “*Four musicians who regularly aspire for greater heights with each venture reach the summit together on Aspiration,*” writes S. Victor Aaron in Something Else. As the leader of no less than five orchestras in the U.S., Germany, and Japan (two of which, Berlin and Tokyo, released new CDs in 2018), Fujii has also established herself as one of the world’s leading composers for large jazz ensembles, leading Cadence magazine to call her, “*the Ellington of free jazz.*”

Award-winning mallet player-composer **Taiko Saito** was born in Sapporo but currently lives in Berlin. She studied with marimba virtuoso Keiko Abe and studied classical marimba and percussion at the Toho School of Music. In 1997 she began to improvise and to write music, and moved to Berlin, where she studied vibraphone and composition with David Friedman at the Universität der Künste Berlin. In 2003 she founded the marimba/vibraphone-piano duo with German jazz piano player Niko Meinhold. Their album *Koko* was released in 2005 and *Live in Bogotá* was released in 2014. Reed player Tobias Schirmer joins them to make the trio *Kokotob*. Together with Rupert Stamm, she also created the jazz mallets duo *Patema* who’s recording was released by Zerozero in 2007. She is a founding member of the Berlin Mallet Group, which also includes her former teacher Friedman. She also performs with Fujii, Natsuki Tamura, Schirmer, and percussive dancer Mizuki Wildenhahn in *Puzzle*. Recently she played with Mary Halvorson at Berlin Jazz Festival in 2019, and with Silke Eberhard at the Moers Jazz Festival and Berlin Jazz Festival in 2020.

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