

Piano Days: Kotaro Fukuma in the Atrium at Cleveland Museum of Art (July 29)

by Daniel Hathaway



The motto of Piano Cleveland’s Piano Days, “Celebrate piano in all its forms,” included ticketed events as well as many free “Community” performances and happenings.

At noon on Tuesday, July 29, what was described as a sound installation brought Japanese pianist Kotaro Fukuma back to Cleveland, where he had taken first prize in the 2003 Cleveland International Piano Competition, to play an hour-long pop-up concert of Japanese music in the atrium of the Cleveland Museum of Art.

(Fukuma also performed a more formal program in CIM’s Mixon Hall later in the week).

The Ames Family Atrium is a wonderful venue for a community concert. Rafael Vinoly’s great enclosed space that connects the old and new parts of the museum invites informal gatherings as well as structured events, and whatever happens there inevitably attracts an audience of passersbys as well as planned attendees.

On Tuesday, the venue was especially suitable for Fukuma’s program because the performance took place next to the re-creation of the *Yumedono*, or Dream Hall, from Nara Prefecture’s Hōryūji Temple complex, built in conjunction with Takashi Mirkami’s *Stepping on the Tail of a Rainbow*.

A crowd was already seated as noon approached, and gallery stools were dispatched to accommodate what promised to be a steady stream of new listeners.

Playing from an iPad, Fukuma began his immersive program with Minako Tokuyama’s *Musica Nara*. Beginning with a loud chord depicting a Japanese temple bell, the work inventively changes style from modern to impressionistic and

then to jazz-influenced — a nice way to set the musical tone for the hour-long program.

Fukuma told the crowd that the themes of water and light are important to him before playing Karen Tanaka's *Water Dance*. The three-movement work's melodies are simple and attractive, as are those of Tōru Takemitsu's *Rain Tree Sketches* Nos. 1 and 2, which Fukuma played with great sensitivity,

Ryuichi Sakamoto, well-known for his score to the movie *The Last Emperor* was represented by his atmospheric *Aqua* — the first of three movie scores on Fukuma's program.

In the 2019 film *Listen to the Universe*, four young pianists compete in the preliminary round of an international piano competition. Fukuma, who played Dai Fujikura's *Spring and Asura* in the role of Akashi Takashima, brought personal experience to bear. Again the influence of impressionism was evident, before the pianist burst into blazing runs in both hands.

On the lighter side, Joe Hisaishi's *One Summer's Day* and *Castles in the Sky* led to a jazzy Japanese pop song that ended Fukuma's program with rhythmic energy and impressive virtuosity. A delightful way to spend an hour in the middle of the day.

The event was well attended by people who chose to come and many others who were simply visiting the Museum — and doubtless enjoying lunch as well.

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