

UP, UP AND AWAY

Miho Hatori forecasts the future with instruments from far off and long ago

Admirers of the highly regarded Manhattan-based duo Cibo Matto can attest to Miho Hatori's quirky musical sensibilities. But on her solo debut album, Hatori stepped up her pop-meets-left-field ideas with a 60-some-year-old stringed instrument called a marxolin.

"I have had the marxolin for over 12 years, but I have never used it for recording," she says. "It was under the bed. It was about time for it to show up."

Ecdysis (Rykodisc, 2006) calls from weathered, humble sources like the marxolin, but an electronic pulse twirls almost undetected beneath its surface, courtesy of Hatori. With a number of styles, the Japan native guides each chapter on the very literate *Ecdysis* so that it stretches into multiple rewarding directions.

Diverse percussion rattles throughout, accented most playfully by organ chords and accordion on "Barracuda" (with less guitar than the Heart effort of the same name), while lush downtempo makes for an eloquent weaving of organic and programmed beats during "In Your Arms." Aside from one shared song credit on *Ecdysis*, Hatori wrote all the music and played several instruments, as well as produced the beats like those on "In

Your Arms." And her collaboration with Brazilian percussionist Mauro Refosco on "A Song for Kids" helped her gain a new perspective on rhythm tracks.

"When I started Smokey and Miho [Hatori's collaboration with Smokey Hormel], I encountered the Brazilian percussion sound," Hatori says. "We met Mauro Refosco, who became a member of Smokey and Miho, and is my drummer today. I love human-made beats. Meeting Mauro introduced a sound I wanted to try for a long time: a mixture of electronic sounds and human-made beats that aren't 'killing each other.' That is something I think about a lot generally, 'coexistence with nature.'"


Hatori's narrative verses on *Ecdysis* often deal with nature or futuristic themes. (She notes that her stories sometimes have no place in the present, so she looks to the future, where there is "100-percent freedom.") While she crafts beats for these tales on her Yamaha QY20 Sequencer & Tone Module or looks to the Korg Electribe series for her programming needs, she says Refosco's percussion "coexists" in wondrous unison with her productions. On closer "Amazona," for example, an array of instruments is attributed to Refosco, who assumes the role of "the forest" on the track. At just under two lovely minutes, Hatori's samba melody and her curiosity about the Amazon jungle dissipate a tad too early.

"I think there are two elements in this track, percus-

sionwise," Refosco says. "One is the bird calls—cuica—and the seeds that I used to create the 'forest sound.' The other is the rhythm part." Among the various shakers and samba-specific drums that Refosco offers on "Amazona," he also plays agogo bells. The combination made for a high-end frequency range on the song, which was Hatori's vision.

"I tried to establish a pattern but not that much, so I would fluctuate a bit around being right and wrong," Refosco says. "She did not want any low-end instruments on this track. It seemed funny at first, but then it made sense when I heard the mix of it."

On "A Song for Kids," Refosco plays a zabumba, "which uses a mallet to get the low end from the top head and a piece of bamboo stick to get the high end from the bottom head," he explains. Hatori's story in the song—cheerily offered in her native tongue—is childlike, with sentiments like "Right now is precious" floating over unpronounced synths that loom deep in the left channel. But it's too vibrant as a score for any of the trivial nonsense that American kids watch on TV.

After all, Hatori has a good deal of worldly experience—and some really old instruments from under her bed. "I am okay with whatever—the keyboard or toys," she says of her curious arrangements, "But I care about it making sense. The texture of the sound must match my song, my lyrics and my voice." 

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—Miho Hatori

