

Beauty of the music across the East and the West

Members Biography



Kazuo Nakamura (Bass)

Kazuo Nakamura was born in Gifu, Japan. In 1996, endowed with Berklee College of Music Asian Scholarship, he launched to Boston where he learned with Bruce Gartz, Whit Browne, Oscar Stagnaro, Ed Thomasi, and Tiger Okoshi. Since graduated in 1996, he has moved to New York City and has been actively performing with New York jazz giants such as : Zane Massey, Roy Campbell, Vinnie Ruggieri, Don Hahn, Eric Lewis and among others. Besides jazz music, his most recent activity includes : Richmond County Orchestra as Principal Bass, Bronx Symphony Orchestra, AB & Company (R&B), Bob Kaiser HappyBand (New Orleans) , Ray Rivera Group (Latin) and Russel Strummer (Rock). His original ideas and compositions are powerful driving force of the band.



Takeshi Asai (Piano)

Takeshi Asai is a pianist and composer who has a strong background of jazz tradition and the versatile musicianship as a concert pianist, film composer and song writer. His music showcases a rich mix of the beauty from European tradition to modern American music to Eastern folk music. Takeshi graduated from Berklee College of Music in 1997 with honor, where he studied jazz improvisation with Laszlo Gardoney, Joanne Brackeen, Ed Tomassi and Ray Santisi, piano technique with Ed Bedner and advanced harmony with Steve Rochinski. In 1995, while he was a student, Takeshi released his debut CD, Kaleidoscope and toured Japan and South Korea where most of his performances were televised nationwide. In 1998 he released his second CD, Somewhere in the Universe from Hao Records and toured six major cities in Japan. In June 2000 he made his debut as a film composer by producing music for a promotion video of a Boston based IT company. In summer of 2000, he returned to Japan for another series of public performances including The Piano Concert in Shinagawa. Takeshi moved in to New York area to launch his career in the big city in February 2001. Since then, he has performed at number of jazz clubs including Kavehaz and Knitting Factory. In New York, he joined his old friend Kazuo to start a Japanese jazz ensemble which has eventually become WaFoo. His in-depth knowledge of the languages and cultures is an asset to WaFoo. As a pianist, he is a source of the rich harmonic rendition of the band's repertoires and as a composer; he has worked on the marquee repertoire of the band such as Shunlai, Sakura Sakura and Hana-no-Machi.



Yuuki Koike (Flute & Alto Sax)

Yuuki Koike started taking piano lessons when she was 2 years old. At age of 9, she started playing the flute in her school band. After She joined Big Band, New Swingin' Herd which was very high quality band and won first prizes in Yamano Big Band Contest and started playing alto saxophone while she was majoring in German literature in Rikkyo University. She learned saxophone from Hisashige Kato, one of the great saxophone players in the Japanese jazz scene. For New Swingin' Herd, her flute was always first-call and also her firm and clear saxophone sound led the band to higher level. At the same time, she formed Latin Jazz Band. She has been playing flute/piccolo in Richmond County Orchestra and alto saxophone/flute in some jazz and rock bands since she moved to United States. Her deep and colorful tone is an irreplaceable asset for WaFoo to create their own style, amalgam of jazz and Japanese traditional sounds as is reviewed by Staten Island Advance. Besides music, she plays an important role as a Web/Graphic designer for the band.



Masashi Sonoda (Guitar)

Masashi Sonoda was born in Tokyo and began studying the classical guitar at the age of eleven. In 1990 he moved to Boston and continued his studies of music at the Berklee College of Music with Herb Pomeroy, Ken Pullig and John Damian. After graduation he finally migrated to New York City: the jazz capital of planet earth. He studied at CUNY with Ron Carter, Mike Hollober and David Del Tredici. By finishing school he has frequently appeared in gigs and concerts in local area. In 2003 he joined WaFoo. His unique and powerful performance brings the band to another level.



Ippei Ichimaru (Cello & Bass)

Performing in 170+ shows every year, one of the most active and versatile bass players working in New England today, Ippei Ichimaru joined WaFoo in 2004. He was born and raised in Southern Tokyo, which is very traditional and historic side of Tokyo contrary to the metropolis everyone knows, and spent his youth in Melbourne, Australia before moving to Boston to pursue his passion for playing the bass. Wherever he was, music and the relationship that the people had with music have been very central to him. Although WaFoo is Ichimaru's first Japanese project, he had had the idea of bringing his Japanese roots to his performance all these years, which he couldn't really pull it off with any other band. He is employing all the knowledge on one hand, ravaging the same knowledge on the other, and creating a new genre of music with WaFoo.



Sanae Asai (Vocal & Calligraphy)

Vocalist Sanae Asai is a very logical and natural addition to the instrumentation of WaFoo, for the natural style of her singing is very close to how people hear lullabies and children's songs in Japan. But, that's not the only talent Sanae brings to the ensemble. She is also a professional calligrapher. Raised in the historic district of Tokyo, Japanese calligrapher Sanae developed her talent and enthusiasm in art of letters in early ages. As a young student, she received number of awards and by age of 23, she was licensed to have her own school. Thanks to the versatility, her mastery of the style covers Chinese classics to modern Japanese, which provides WaFoo with a great visual support of the music. After moving into the New York area, she has been active in presenting the works in festivals and leading calligraphy classes in tri-state area. In October 2004, she was invited by the Japan Society to hold a solo exhibition in Greenwich, CT and it has become an annual event since then.



Yutaka Uchida (Drums)

Drummer/Composer Yutaka Uchida hails from Tokyo, Japan and currently resides in New York. He studied drumming initially with Norihiko Nara, and later at Berklee College of Music with legendary drummers such as Kenwood Dennard, Rod Morgenstein and Bob Tamagni. He also studied composition with renowned composers such as Ken Pullig, Dick Lowell, Ted Pease and Steve Rochinski. While at school, he received the first annual Louie Bellson Award (Avedis Zildjian Co.) in recognition of his outstanding performance. Upon graduation he moved to New York City where he's been actively pursuing his art of drumming and composing. His weekly appearance at Cleopatra's Needle, a long standing jazz club on the Upper Westside, is now widely recognized. In 2005 he received the Performing Arts Award from Council on the Arts and Humanities for Staten Island (COAHSI), and performed with his brand new project Planet Music at COAHSI JuneFest, which turned out to be a tremendous success. In WaFoo, he brings his own version of Japanese tradition that makes the band's sound uniquely colorful.