



Isaiah marks the twentieth anniversary of the Pan Asian Chamber Jazz Ensemble, my home for musical exploration and the one place I can be free. Free to express myself at a time when it can feel dangerous to be openly Jewish. This album is a musical memoir of my shifting identities. As an immigrant, a Jew by choice, in an interracial marriage, and as a musician moving from classical to jazz, I have often felt like an outsider. In composing, I found solace — a realm where I am not an outsider. Through PACJE, I have shaped a sound distinctly my own, not bound to a single style but defined by the freedom to move among them. Each piece reflects a facet of that journey.

The opening work, Sushi Gadol (סושי גדול, Big Sushi), is a tribute to my brother Yasushi (寧), once an amateur heavy-metal drummer and now a Protestant pastor in my hometown. His name means "peaceful," yet the music bursts with explosive gestures and restless energy, establishing a spirit of defiance.

Blessing draws on the Before Haftarah Blessing. Having chanted it at my own adult bat mitzvah — and more recently hearing my daughter chant it at hers — I reimagine it here in multiple guises: first through orchestral textures, then as a jazz waltz.

The title track, *Isaiah*, follows — the actual Haftarah portion for *Re'eh* (Isaiah 54:11–17) from my bat mitzvah. Months of grueling study, learning Hebrew as an adult, and preparing the chant became more bearable when I accompanied myself at the piano. And voilà.

Rice Country, composed during a Copland House residency, reflects on the Japanese term for America, Beikoku (米国, "rice country"). A fragment of a 1970s Japanese pop song is reframed through the lens of Copland's American idiom, embodying the complexities of immigrant identity and belonging.

Afrasia Intro leads seamlessly into African Skies, Michael Brecker's iconic tune that defined so much of the 1990s for me. Performing in Brecker's Quindectet with Gil Goldstein as MD was a dream realized, and one of my deepest inspirations as I grew into a jazz composer. This rendition is unmistakably my own, using my earlier work Afrasia (from Naima, 2010) as a springboard to fuse the two pieces. Featuring his brother, Randy Brecker, as guest soloist continues that lineage.

Sunset Bells offers a meditation on closure and transformation, ringing with both solitude and celebration, and fulfills a long-held wish of mine: to hear Randy Brecker's solo on a sunset theme.

Jubberish, a commission from Chamber Music America's New Jazz Works, takes its title from my daughter's childhood invention — "Gibberish, but Jewish." The melody imitates the style of Eastern European folk music, but it is entirely made up, with no ties to any real language or country — and thus, Jubberish.

The album concludes with Will You Hear My Voice (Hatishma Koli / התשמע קולים), a setting of a gentle, yearning poem by Rachel Bluwstein (1890, Saratov, Russia – 1931, Tel Aviv, Mandatory Palestine). The text has inspired many musical settings, but here I offer my own. I have sung this before, but here I chose to sing it through my violin. The poet writes of waiting "as Rachel waited for her beloved," invoking the biblical matriarch — a resonance made more personal since my own Hebrew name is also Rachel. This album is both a reaching out and an affirmation.

Will you hear my voice?

Weg Okura

"Meg Okura's forthcoming album **Isaiah** stands as a profound musical statement—an emotionally rich and expansive work that highlights her exceptional talents as a composer, violinist, and visionary bandleader."

— Regina Carter

MEG OKURA | PAN ASIAN CHAMBER JAZZ ENSEMBLE

Meg Okura - violin, electric violin (erhu on tracks 2 & 6; vocal on track 2)

Anne Drummond - flute

Sam Sadigursky - bass clarinet (flute on tracks 5 & 9; clarinet on track 4)

David Smith - trumpet, flugelhorn

Rebecca Patterson - tenor & bass trombone

Riza Printup - harp

John Lee – electric guitar (acoustic guitar on tracks 4 & 9)

Brian Marsella - piano

Evan Gregor – acoustic & electric bass

Peter Kronreif – drums

GUEST MUSICIANS

Randy Brecker - trumpet (tracks 5, 6, 7 & 8)

Sam Newsome - soprano saxophone (tracks 2, 5, 6, 7 & 8)

Remy Le Boeuf – alto saxophone & clarinet (tracks 3 & 9)

Rogério Boccato - percussion (tracks 6 & 8)

ADDITIONAL MUSICIANS

YOTAM ISHAY - ORGAN (TRACKS 6 & 7)

NAOMI NEWSOME - VOCAL (TRACK 2)



Produced & edited by Meg Okura

Co-producer: Remy Le Boeuf

Assistant producer & conductor: Erica Seguine

Production assistant: Tracy Yang

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York City

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