


ISAI AH
MEG OKURA



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- A woman with long dark hair, wearing a white blazer over a dark top and a gold necklace, sits at a piano. Her hands are clasped in front of an open sheet music book. To her right, a violin and bow rest on the piano. The background is dark, and the piano's internal strings and hammers are visible in the foreground.
1. **Sushi Gadol** (Meg Okura, Anne Drummond) – 5:48
 2. **Blessing** (David Smith) – 4:04
 3. **Isaiah** (Meg Okura, Remy Le Boeuf) – 6:10
 4. **Rice Country*** (Brian Marsella) – 7:48
 5. **African Morning Vignette** – 1:11
 6. **African Skies** (Randy Brecker, Brian Marsella, Meg Okura) – 9:32
 7. **Sunset Bells** (John Lee, Randy Brecker) – 7:06
 8. **Jubberish**** (Meg Okura, Sam Newsome) – 7:56
 9. **Will You Hear My Voice** (John Lee, Remy Le Boeuf) – 6:02

* *Rice Country* was written while in residence at Copland House, Cortlandt Manor, New York, as a recipient of the Copland House Residency Award.

***Jubberish* was made possible with support from Chamber Music America's 2018 New Jazz Works program, funded through the generosity of the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation.

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MEG OKURA | PAN ASIAN CHAMBER JAZZ ENSEMBLE

Special Guests:

RANDY BRECKER
SAM NEWSOME

All compositions by Meg Okura, except "African Skies" (Michael Brecker; arranged & orchestrated by Meg Okura).
All works arranged & orchestrated by Meg Okura

***Isaiah** marks the twentieth anniversary of the Pan Asian Chamber Jazz Ensemble, my home for musical exploration — 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.*

***African Morning Vignette** leads seamlessly into **African Skies**, Michael Brecker’s iconic tune that defined so much of the 1990s for me. Performing in Brecker’s *Quindecet* 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 קולי), 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?*

Meg 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



THE PAN ASIAN CHAMBER JAZZ ENSEMBLE



Meg Okura – violin, electric violin (erhu on track 2; vocal on track 2)

Anne Drummond – flute

Sam Sadigursky – bass clarinet (flute on track 5; 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

Sam Newsome – soprano saxophone (tracks 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 Seguire**

Production assistant: **Tracy Yang**

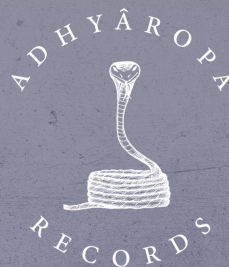
Recorded by **Marc Urselli** at East Side Sound Studio, New York City (May 7–8, 2022)

Additional recording by **Chris Sulit** at Trading 8s Recording Studio, Paramus, NJ

Mixed & mastered by **David Darlington** at Bass Hit Studio, New York City

Photo by Matt Baker

Design by Meg Okura



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