



AARON BLAKEY: OBIHIRO

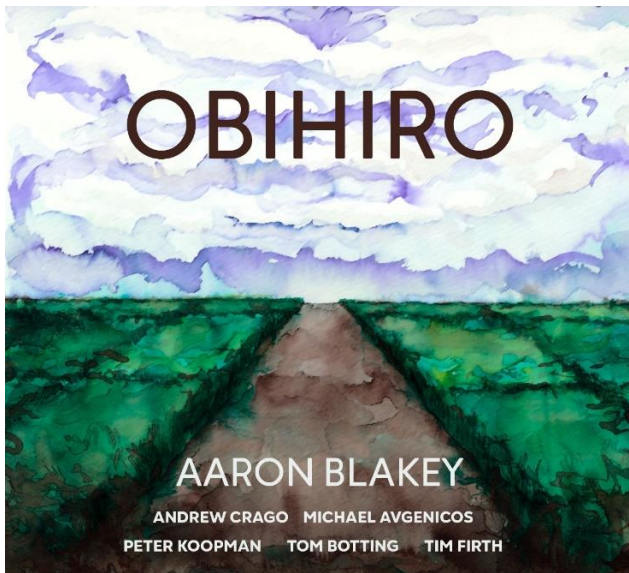
Album review by Eric Myers

Label: Independent

Personnel: Aaron Blakey (piano), Tom Botting (double bass), Peter Koopman (guitar), Andrew Crago (alto sax), Michael Avgenicos (tenor sax), Tim Firth (drums).

[This review appeared in the magazine of the Australian Jazz Museum AJAZZ 97, May, 2023, on page 18, and can be read there at this link

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#inbox/FMfcgzGsmNZFzhMBDjJzKZzZjnNGkgCW?projector=1&messagePartId=0.1>



I first became aware of pianist Aaron Blakey in November, 2019, when I heard the Sydney quartet led by alto saxophonist Michael Griffin. My review, entitled “Pub jazz springs to life in Sydney’s King Cross” appeared in *The Australian* around that time. Subsequently I heard Blakey, again as a sideman, on Michael Walder’s

excellent 2021 album *Blues for Ray*. A piano trio album with Walder on double bass, and drummer Alex Hirlian, who won the 2018 National Jazz Award at Wangaratta, it also included horn players Simon Ferenci (trumpet) and Chris O’Dea (tenor saxophone) on some tracks. Even when surrounded by these splendid musicians, Blakey’s brilliance shone through.

Late in 2022, in what would prove to be the last performance in Sydney of the alto saxophonist Andrew Speight – shortly before his suicide in December, 2022 – Blakey joined a jam session at Foundry 616 in the company of many leading local musicians, and played a feature number on piano which was an extraordinary tour de force.



At a jam session at Foundry 616 in late 2022, curated by the late Andrew Speight (pictured above), Blakey played a feature number on piano which was an extraordinary tour de force... PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN

Having been primed by these encounters, I was therefore expecting some highly impressive music when the album *Obihiro* arrived, and I was not disappointed. It’s an outstanding album of contemporary hard-bop which continues a long tradition of New Zealand musicians moving across the ditch to Australia and enriching the local jazz scene.

Blakey, now 38, arrived in Sydney in 2011, after establishing himself in NZ before moving to Japan for five years. He is joined here by two Kiwis Tom Botting (double bass) and Peter Koopman (guitar), plus Aussies Andrew Crago (alto sax), Michael Avgenicos (tenor sax) and Tim Firth (drums). All play with considerable brilliance,

on nine excellent Blakey compositions, inspired by a variety of life experiences. The title track *Obihiro* for example is a town in Japan where Blakey ran on country roads edged by rice fields.



Blakey: compositions on Obihiro inspired by a variety of life experiences...PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN

Blakey is such a mature pianist and composer that it's something of a surprise that this is only his second album as a leader. An uninhibited pianist, whose improvisations are overflowing with ideas, he is heard to great advantage on this outstanding album.

Other articles on this site which may be of interest:

Eric Myers, "Michael Griffin Quartet: Pub Jazz Springs to Life in Kings Cross", *The Australian*, November 27, 2019, at this link <https://ericmyersjazz.com/theaustralian-2015-15>

Eric Myers, "Michael Walder Trio: Blues For Ray", *AJAZZ* 91, November 2021, at this link <https://ericmyersjazz.com/ajazz-3>