

Akiko Tsuruga

Jazz Organist

New York City based Hammond Organist and pianist, Akiko Tsuruga, has established herself as an 'in demand' player since arriving from her hometown of Osaka, Japan in 2001.

Akiko began organ lessons at age three, and starting performing professionally throughout Japan after graduating from Osaka College of Music. While performing in Japan, she met and played with many noted American musicians, Roy Hargrove, Jeff "Tain" Watts and Grady Tate to name a few. She credits Grady Tate as being the biggest influence in her career. He played on her debut CD, "*Harlem Dreams*" and encouraged her to move to New York.

After arriving in New York, Akiko established herself as one of the area's top organist /pianists. Her trio featuring guitarist Eric Johnson and drummer Vincent Ector has been one of the area's top groups, working at many jazz nightclubs including *Dizzy's (at Lincoln center)* and *The Blue Note*. Her trio also plays private parties and summer outdoor concerts. Her long awaited debut CD, "*Harlem Dreams*" featuring Grady Tate and Frank Wess was released in Japan on the M&I Company label on May 19, 2004.

Akiko's CD is so popular in Japan she has returned twice to perform. Her CD release tour in August 2004 featured Grady Tate on drums and guitarist Satoshi Inoue. In September 2005, she returned to Japan with guitarist Eric Johnson and drummer Fukushi Tainaka.

It was this trip that caught the eyes and ears of Hammond Suzuki officials. The group was invited to the factory and Mr. Suzuki personally awarded her a Hammond XK-3 organ and endorsement.

Among her accomplishments is a jazz organ instructional book "*Hammond Organ Complete*" (Berklee Press) which was translated from English to Japanese and has been published in Japan.

When she's not leading her trio, she still enjoys working as a featured sideman in Grady Tate's vocal group and with saxophonist Lou Donaldson among many others. Akiko's new CD "*Sweet and Funky*" is now finished and will be released in both Japan (M&I Company) and in the United States and Canada on 18th & Vine. Akiko was also featured playing piano in the Japanese movie "*Last Love*".

2007 was an especially fruitful year for Akiko. Highlights included performances with the Lou Donaldson Quartet at Birdland, the Village Vanguard, and Carnegie Hall. She also performed at various jazz festivals and on jazz cruises throughout the US.

"Sweet and Funky", Akiko's first release in the US and Canada and her second in Japan, has been receiving rave reviews. It has reached #13 on the jazz radio charts and received a four-star review from *Downbeat* magazine.

In October, Akiko released her third album in Japan, *"St. Louis Blues"*, featuring Bernard Purdie on drums and Houston Person on saxophone. After the CD release, Akiko embarked on a highly-acclaimed tour of Japan with her regular working trio. This recording received *Swing Journal* magazine's New Star Award, a first for an organist, which is truly a remarkable achievement.