

YELLOW MAGIC ORCHESTRA CHRONICLE

1978~1993

カノムツ

This story revolves around the 6 years that make up the "YMO era", during which the paths of the three main characters, Haruomi Hosono, Ryuichi Sakamoto and Yukihiro Takahashi, crossed and their fates overlapped, generating huge excitement. This world-famous band, who successfully completed two world tours, played a huge role in the emergence of genres such as hip-hop and house.

This colossus of a band was born in a technologically advanced country and completely changed the landscape of the recording studio, but how was YMO formed, how did it take shape, and what did it leave behind?

Their "Technodon Tragicomedy" caused big waves and became an integral part of the turbulent 1980s. Let us take a deep dive into the myth of YMO.

Yuji Tanaka

Author's profile:

Having worked as deputy editor for a weekly magazine and as a book editor, he is now a producer for a video production company. He was involved in documentaries about Matsuo Ohno, TM Network, etc. As an author of non-fiction, he wrote "Electronic Music in Japan" (published by Aspect), "Showa TV Children's Song Chronicle", "Elevator Music: A History of BGM in Japan", "The Gods Who Created the TR-808" (all published by DU BOOKS), "AKB48 and Japanese Rock: The Idols Business Theory of Yasushi Akimoto" (Small Publishing) as well as undertaking other writing activities. In relation to YMO, he was the brain behind the "The Cult Of YMO" episode of "Cult Q" (1993/Fuji TV), he also published a long interview collection called "YELLOW MAGIC ORCHESTRA" (Aspect) for which each member was interviewed for 10 hours, and contributed to official publications such as "Hideki Matsutake And The Synthesizer" (co-author, published by DU BOOKS), liner notes for CD releases by Haruomi Hosono, Ryuichi Sakamoto and Yukihiro Takahashi, and the pamphlet for Isao Tomita's memorial concert.

In memory of  
Yukihiro Takahashi (6 Jun 1952 - 11 Jan 2023)  
Ryuichi Sakamoto (17 Jan 1952 - 28 Mar 2023)

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# Table of Contents

Foreword.....	13
Chapter 1: How Haruomi Hosono Became The Producer.....	15
■ Hosono's Childhood Musical Experiences .....	15
■ Goodbye America, Japan, Hello Tropical.....	16
■ "Tropical Dandy" .....	19
■ "Uncle Haisai" and Rediscovering Martin Denny.....	20
■ Club Nisei Orchestra and "Taian Yoko".....	23
■ Meeting Ryuichi Sakamoto at a Concert in Chinatown .....	24
■ The Formation of Tin Pan Alley .....	26
■ Transfer to Crown.....	28
■ Tin Pan Alley's Premature "Producer Focus".....	30
Chapter 2: Alfa Records Changes the Music Industry - Its History until Haruomi Hosono Arrives .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
■ The Birth of Alfa Music.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
■ Alfa & Associates and Studio A .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
■ Alfa's Tradition of "Head Arrangement" .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
■ Haruomi Hosono Signs a Producer Contract with Alfa .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
■ Hosono's Dream of "Going Global" .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
■ The First Blueprint for YMO.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
■ Alfa Records and Hosono's "Paraiso".....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
■ Wishing to Become a Monk .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
■ The Magic in "Yellow Magic Orchestra".....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Chapter 3: How did Haruomi Hosono, Yukihiro Takahashi and Ryuichi Sakamoto Meet?.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
■ The Disco Band Concept .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
■ Meeting Yukihiro Takahashi.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
■ A Very Different Person Called Ryuichi Sakamoto.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
■ An Audition Called "Femme Fatale" .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
■ The Yellow Magic Orchestra Formation Ceremony .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
■ Takahashi and Sakamoto: "Why I Joined YMO" .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
■ YMO in the Post Tin Pan Alley Era.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Chapter 4: A Revelation from Tadanori Yokoo - Hosono Discovers Kraftwerk in India .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
■ A Profile of Ryuichi Sakamoto .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
■ Sakamoto's Encounter with Electronic Music .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
■ "Disappointment-Hateruma" .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
■ Serving Time as a Studio Musician .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
■ A Fusion of Rock and Jazz.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>

- Ryuichi Sakamoto and Haruomi Hosono Meet ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- Ryuichi Sakamoto and Yukihiro Takahashi Meet..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- The "Thousand Knives" of Ryuichi Sakamoto ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- Takahashi Nicknames Sakamoto "Professor" ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- Hosono: "I'm Afraid of Becoming Enemies" ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- Profile of Yukihiro Takahashi..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- Joins the Sadistic Mika Band ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- Takahashi's "Saravah!" ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- Takahashi's Obsession with Drum Sounds..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- Haruomi Hosono & Tadanori Yokoo's "Cochin Moon" ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- Hosono Discovers Kraftwerk in India..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- Meeting Computer Programmer Hideki Matsutake..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- Phantom YMO Member Tadanori Yokoo ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- Giorgio Moroder: the Prototype of Early YMO..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- Hosono Productions Typically Feature Female Vocalists ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- Reasons for Introducing Computers to Music ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

## Chapter 5: The First Eccentricity - Premature 'Future Music' - The Birth of YMO

..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

- Establishing a Tradition of "Studio Composition"..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- Establishing the First Computer Protocol..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- How to Reproduce a "Human Groove" using a Computer .... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- The Production Site of "Yellow Magic Orchestra" ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- The Godard Trilogy and the Keio Department of French Literature.. Error! Bookmark not defined.
- Hosono: "YMO's Singer is Yukihiro" ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- The Participation of Experimental Poet Chris Mosdell ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- YMO's Unfinished Ghost Track "Indo"..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- "Yellow Magic Orchestra" Causes Confusion..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- Studio New Wave..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- Using Game Sounds to Open the Curtain ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- "Lower Body Rhythm - Solar Plexus Excitement - Head Spinning" .... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- Business Alliance between Alfa Records and A&M ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- YMO Debuts in America ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- Yellow Magic Orchestra ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- YMO's "Live Methods" ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- The Era of Roppongi Pit Inn ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- The Martial Arts Sessions and "Summer Nerves" ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- Kazumi Watanabe + Ryuichi Sakamoto = KYLYN..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- "KYLYN Live" ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

## Chapter 6: 'The Folk Music of Tokyo' - 'Solid State Survivor' Hits 1 Million Copies

..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

- YMO is the "Folk Music of Tokyo" ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- The Global Expansion Concept "Metamorphosis" ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- "Day Tripper" and the Influence of Devo..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- The Byouki Sound..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- "Behind the Mask" ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- The Secrets Behind "Rydeen" ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- Produced by Hosono: "Vacuum Pack" by Sheena & The Rokkets ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- YMO's Ghost Song "Floating Peach Girl" ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

Chapter 7: Overseas Expansion - The First World Tour Gets Under Way ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

- Tommy LiPuma's First Glimpse of YMO at Kinokuniya ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- Why Did YMO Decide to Perform Live?..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- The Birth of Yoroshita Music ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- The Support from Kazumi Watanabe and Akiko Yano ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- The Influence of Punk/New Wave..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- Quick Thinking Results in a Performance at the Greek Theatre ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- Why Kazumi Watanabe Performed with Early YMO ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- London Welcomes YMO's Performances..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- YMO Makes a Stand Against the Errors of MC-8..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- Was YMO's World Tour a Success?..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- The Unexpected YMO Boom in Japan ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- Alfa's Video Promotion Tricks ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

Chapter 8: The 'Kazumi Watanabe Guitar Wiping Incident' - The Black Comedy Inside 'X∞Multiplies' ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

- Plans for a Live Album..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- What Happened to Kazumi Watanabe's Guitar Tracks..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- Public Response to "Public Pressure" ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- "Nice Age", "Citizens of Science"..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- The Impact of Kenji Sawada's "Tokio" ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- Domestic Tour "Technopolis 2000-20"..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- The Story of "X∞Multiplies" ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- The "Shagaku Festival" Nightmare at Nippon Budokan ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- The Snakeman Show ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- Alfa Records and "Black Comedy"..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- Takahashi's "Murdered By The Music" and British New Wave ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

Chapter 9: 'Was YMO's Overseas Expansion Successful?' ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

- Ryuichi Sakamoto Goes Punk ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- Yoshitaka Goto and Pass Records ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

■ From "Lexington Queen" to "War Head" .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ Sakamoto's "B-2 Unit" .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ Air Studios and Studio 80.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ Post-punk = Dub Music .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ The Influence of Weill/Brecht .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ The Second World Tour .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ Signs of a Change in "YMO Music" .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ Landing in the US and Chaplin Memorial Studio .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ YMO Give Up on Global Expansion.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ Hosono: "YMO Without Synthesizers" .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.

Chapter 10: The Making of 'BGM' - The Depths of Psychology ..Error! Bookmark not defined.

■ The Influence of British New Wave .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ Muzak .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ The Flying Lizards Phenomenon .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ The Influence of Ultravox on "Cue".....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ Minimal Music, Contemporary Music.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ The Introduction of the "DMS" by 3M.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ Ryuichi Sakamoto's Resistance.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ John Cage's "4:33".....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ YMO Sing Their Own Lyrics.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ A Short Time to Record.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ BGM's Slump on the Chart.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ "Keeping the Fans at a Distance" .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.

Chapter 11: Takahashi Recording in London - The Real Image of Post-punk ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

■ Romantic Neurosis: "Neuromantic".....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ Sessions with the London Network .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.

Chapter 12: Ryuichi Sakamoto's Fieldwork in Asia - A Break and a Fresh Start.. Error! Bookmark not defined.

■ Broadcasts from "Sound Street" .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ Sakamoto's Single "Front Line" .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ Sakamoto's Album "Left-Handed Dream".....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ The Split from Robin Scott .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ "The Arrangement" .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.

Chapter 13: The World's First Sampled Album - Two Masterpieces - 'Spreading Apart' .....

■ The Birth of Logic System .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ Putting the LinnDrum on "Venus".....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ The Creation of the "LMD-649".....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ Tape Looping on "Taiso" .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.



■ Sampling and Folk Music.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ Psychedelic Techno.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ The Crossroads called the "Pentatonic" .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ Takahashi Forms The Beatniks .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ "Existentialism" .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ Winter Live.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ "Spreading Apart" before "Spreading" .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.

Chapter 14: A New Rock Star - The YEN Label - YMO's 'Blank Period' in 1982 **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

■ "I-Ke-Na-I Rouge Magic" .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ Sakamoto Transfers to London Records .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ The YEN Label and Starting Up LDK Studio.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ Hosono Secretly Buys an MC-4.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ The YEN Label.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ The Establishment of Office Intenzio.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ The Impact of Guernica.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ Hosono's "Philharmony".....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ The "Emulator" and Automatic Writing.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ Guernica's "A Move Toward Remodeling".....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ Takahashi's "What, Me Worry?" .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ "Techno in Japanese" .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ The YEN Medium Label.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ The Ambient Craze.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.

Chapter 15: From Novelty to Dominance - YMO's Contribution to the Birth of 'Techno Kayo' ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

■ YMO's Activities in 1982 .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ Imo Kin Trio's "High School Lullaby" .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ YMO "Reform Kayokyoku" .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ Tokuma Japan and "Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind" .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ Seiko Matsuda and the "Happy End Reunion" .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.

Chapter 16: The Party Ends Like This - YMO are 'Spreading', not 'Dissolving' .. **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

■ "Kimi Ni Mune Kyun" .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ A "Musical Experiment" to Top the Chart .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ "YMO Are Cute".....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ There is "Nothing New" about the Concept of "Naughty Boys" .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ The Making of "Naughty Boys" .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ New Credit: "Producer = YMO" .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ "Spreading" instead of "Dissolving" .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ "Service" after "Spreading" .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ "1983 YMO Japan Tour" (The Spreading Tour) .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.

- YMO and Fascism..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- "A Y.M.O. Film Propaganda" ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

Chapter 17: Jun Togawa, Counterculture Star - Final Stage of the YEN Label.... Error!  
**Bookmark not defined.**

- "YEN Label Season 2" Opens with Game Music..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- Back to the Roots: Takahashi's "Tomorrow's Just Another Day" ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- A New Star Arrives for YEN Season 2..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- "Crépuscule" and Recording in Belgium ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- Post-Guernica (Jun Togawa, Keiichi Ohta, Koji Ueno) ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- Takahashi's "Wild & Moody"..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- The "YEN Memorial Album"..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- The Rise and Fall of Alfa America..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- Alfa Records and A&M Part Ways..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

Chapter 18: Ryuichi Sakamoto's Rapid Advance - 'Performance Art' and the Science  
 Expo 85 ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

- "Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence"..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- The Establishment of Midi Records ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- Sakamoto's "Musical Encyclopedia"..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- The Introduction of the "Fairlight CMI"..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- "Field Work" with Thomas Dolby ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- The "First Year of Performance Art" ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- "Esperanto" and Related Projects..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- Science Expo and "TV War"..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- Sakamoto's "Futurista" ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- The Media Bahn Tour ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- Sakamoto's "Neo Geo"..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- The Rise of Cassette Books: "Avec Piano" & "Watering a Flower" ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

Chapter 19: 'Post YMO' - Nightmare at Nippon Budokan - The Non-Standard and  
 Monad Labels ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

- Hosono and Teichiku Sign a Deal ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- "Non-Standard" to Sell, "Monad" to Experiment..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- New Academism..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- The "Gaia Hypothesis" ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- "Globule", the Symbol of a Restart..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- The Influence of Hip-Hop..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- Japanese Instruments and Going Digital..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- Hosono's "S-F-X" ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- Hip-Hop is "SFX Sound"..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- The "OTT" Concept..... Error! Bookmark not defined.
- Happy End Reunite..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

■ The "Non-Standard" Family .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ 12-inch Singles are like "Early Prints of Newspapers" .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ Carrying the Cross of "Post-YMO" .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ The Monad Label Gets Going.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ "Coincidental Music": Experimenting with Commercials.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ Slavic Music and "Night on the Galactic Railroad" .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ The Birth of Friends of Earth (F.O.E) .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ "Body Snatchers" by F.O.E .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ F.O.E's Single "Decline of O.T.T" .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ The Nightmare Opening for James Brown.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ F.O.E's Album "Sex, Energy & Star" .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ The End of the "Non-Standard/Monad" Label.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ Musical Life after "Non-Standard" .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ The Sixty Records Label .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.

Chapter 20: The Success of Checkers - Takahashi's Label - Japanese Monkees .. **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

■ The New T.E.N.T Label .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ The First T.E.N.T Label Release "Once A Fool,..." .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ Going Neo-Acoustic with "...Only When I Laugh" .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ "Idol Thoughts" at the T.E.N.T Label .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ The Beatniks Reconvene.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.

Chapter 21: The Academy Award - The Birth of 'World Sakamoto' - Moving to New York..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

■ Going out into the World as a Film Composer .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ Sakamoto Transfers to Virgin America.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ Sakamoto Moves to New York.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ The Dawn of the Japanese Club Scene.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.

Chapter 22: The Ethnic Carnival in Paris vs the Gulf War - Haruomi Hosono's Ambient Madness .....

■ The Exotica Behind "The Tale Of Genji" .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ Hosono's "Omni Sight Seeing".....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ Teachings of Native Americans .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ Ambient with a Dose of House .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.

Chapter 23: The Musical Revolution Called Ambient House - The Run-up to the 'YMO Regeneration'..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

■ The Sadistic Mika Band Reunites .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ Yukihiro Takahashi Transfers to Toshiba EMI.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ The Revival of Alfa Records, Dance and Remixes .....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ The Fight Resumes around Unreleased Live YMO.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ The Orb's Ambient House Revolution.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
■ "Japanese People" by HIS.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.

Chapter 24: The New Meaning of 'Techno' - Why Did YMO 'Regenerate'? ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

■ The Word "Techno" Takes on a New Meaning .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
■ The "YMO Regeneration" in Action .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
■ "Techno" Guides the "YMO Regeneration" .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
■ The Pre-Production of "Technodon" .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
■ YMO Move to New York .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
■ "Technodon" Reignites Hosono vs Sakamoto .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
■ The "YMO Regeneration" Press Conference .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
■ The Tokyo Dome Performances Signal "The End of YMO" .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
A Guide to YMO & Related on Disc .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
■ Yellow Magic Orchestra .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
■ Haruomi Hosono .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
■ Ryuichi Sakamoto .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
■ Yukihiro Takahashi .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
■ Miscellanea .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
A Long Coda .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Reference Materials .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
■ Liner Notes/Interviews etc. by the Author .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
■ Other Liner Notes .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
■ Magazines .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
■ Booklets / Pamphlets .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
■ Books about YMO .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
■ Books about Other Artists .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
■ Books about Technology .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
■ Other Books .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
■ Web Resources .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Index of Person & Band Names .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Index of Record, Track, Movie & Book Titles .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>

About this book:

This book is based on the YMO-related parts of my book "Electronic Music In Japan" published in 1998, to which I added a large part consisting of the events that took place leading up to the "YMO Regeneration" in 1993, which I hadn't yet discussed. It can be read as a re-ordering of the group's history by inspecting the various CD releases by the members, official booklets etc. and remarks made to me after the earlier publication. As a result, this history of YMO alone has become a long story of 700+ pages. Except for things like essays, it is probably the only book that can be called a complete "history of YMO". Where possible I have included previously unpublished stories that were given to me in interviews by people I know, on the condition of anonymity.

The names of people and equipment that appear in this book are matched to their trademarks as much as possible. Artist names and titles match those commonly used as much as possible. Quoted comments and inconsistent expressions are intentionally left intact, as given.

The Author

Translator's note, summer 2024:

It was a real pleasure to translate this "YMO bible" into English and make it accessible to a larger audience outside Japan. I am indebted to the author, who has been very kind and helpful in clearing up doubts and in clarifying various points. I trust we did everything in our powers to ensure nothing got "lost in translation", and I take full responsibility for anything that did. When it came to Japanese names of persons, albums, tracks and books, I have kept to romanized names as mentioned on sites like Discogs and Wikipedia, if not available I have provided fair translations where possible, else I used phonetics. I've kept the Japanese so-called honorifics such as -san and -kun that are often used in people's quotes. Finally, I have used the name YMO in the singular as well as the plural sense, whichever best suited the context.

# Foreword

The Yellow Magic Orchestra, or YMO, was formed in 1978. In the 1980s, it created a technopop whirlwind using its impenetrable fort of equipment consisting of electronic musical instruments. Known as the first Japanese band to successfully complete two world tours, it had a great influence on the formation of the hip-hop, house, and techno genres in later generations.

Its members were Haruomi Hosono (bass), Ryuichi Sakamoto (keyboards), and Yukihiro Takahashi (drums). These three characters, their understanding of music, and their areas of expertise formed a perfectly balanced triangle, and each used the latest electronic musical instruments, which at the time were still rare.

Their fields of activity were not limited to music, but expanded into mass media, contemporary philosophy, comedy and film-appearances, as a result of which they were dubbed the "Japanese Beatles" by the mass media.

Ironically, similar to what happened in the relationship between John Lennon and Paul McCartney, the group's later atmosphere was dominated by the rivalry between the two members who took the musical initiatives. The other member, drummer Yukihiro Takahashi, has said, "Young Sakamoto was a genius", "Haruomi Hosono was a genius", "I thought I was just an ordinary person. My role was all about mediating between these people", and "The word 'taikomochi' also applies" he once joked<sup>1</sup> (from the book "Saturday Soliton Side B Returns").

The story of YMO began with a series of coincidences.

When Haruomi Hosono came up with the idea of forming YMO, it was during an "era" that was in the midst of a "reversal of values" he was aligning with. YMO was formed just as synthesizers and computers were being introduced into the music production scene. At this point, YMO's public image lacked even the slightest evidence of any rough edge.

The history that followed was the result of an accumulation of accidental events that could almost be called careless. Even the selection of members Sakamoto and Takahashi was almost accidental. To me this coincidence is kind of scary. Because without these two individuals, YMO would never have flourished.

The "first YMO idea", said Hosono, was for a vocal group that didn't even come close to the production concept created in 1977. The idea of using computers was not even included in the plans when YMO was formed.

Like the Beatles, they actually operated for only 6 years, from 1978 to 1983.

But their groundbreaking recording methods changed the landscape of the studio. They developed their knowledge and became the driving force for the evolution of rock/pop music in the 1980s. Even after their dissolution, each member continued to

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<sup>1</sup> Translator's note: the term 'taikomochi' refers to a court jester or male geisha and contains the word 'taiko', a type of Japanese drum.

carry the cross of being "post-YMO", sometimes helping each other, sometimes opposing each other, and each delivering many solo masterpieces into the world. Finally, in 1993, the three of them appeared at the Tokyo Dome as "YMO Regenerated".

This book is almost the first fully-fledged biography that summarizes its 15-year history, from the formation to the first reunion, including their prior history. Instead of talking only about YMO's innovations, we will examine how unique YMO was by embedding the story of this band in the era's music scene. In fact, that is key to understanding this band.

By clarifying the backgrounds to "what made YMO do this?" and "what kind of era was it?", a strikingly creative image of YMO emerges.

For younger generations, YMO is a mystery that is difficult to understand from the sounds that remain. Through this retrospective, using interviews from that time containing the views of the trio about their music, I will attempt to clarify the events that unfolded.

(the author)

# Chapter 1: How Haruomi Hosono Became The Producer

## ■ Hosono's Childhood Musical Experiences

YMO's leader Haruomi Hosono was born in Tokyo in 1947.

As the founder of "Japanese rock" and leader of Happy End, Hosono has featured in many research publications, but while the Buffalo Springfield-influenced folk-rock style of Happy End is part of his musical make-up, Hosono's roots lie elsewhere.

Looking back on his entire career, he sees himself as having lived through a rather special era. Before debuting on the URC label in 1970 with the "Happy End" record (more commonly known as "Yudemen" meaning "boiled noodles"), history tells us he was the bassist of a psychedelic band called Apryl Fool on the Nippon Columbia label, at the end of the so-called GS (Group Sounds) period in Japanese music. In 1955, Elvis Presley made his US debut, which kickstarted the "rock and roll revolution", but prior to that lived a generation who knew the time when the popular music that was commonly featured on the top 40 chart consisted of jazz and movie music.

The Hosono family, who claim themselves to be middle-class, had a modern standard of culture and education, and were in possession of a radio, a gramophone player, and a piano. In the Shirokane, Tokyo area, where he was born, there are many foreign embassies, and he used to hang out there with his foreign friends. He also learned about Western music through the FEN (Far East Network, a station used by the U.S. military to broadcast to its bases). But apparently as a kid he rarely listened to popular songs. His maternal grandfather, Takao Nakatani, was a piano tuner and manager in Japan of the Russian pianist Leonid Kreutzer. At his mother's request, he took piano lessons as a child.

Haruomi Hosono: I quit after taking the exam for junior high school.  
(from the book Omiyage)

Hosono: Burgmüller, Czerny, almost everyone got to the point where they stopped.  
(from the interview collection The Endless Talking)

He wasn't allowed to touch the classical SP vinyl discs because they would break, so he grew up listening to a random mix of wartime popular songs, military songs, Rakugo and Rokyoku storytelling, Hollywood movie music and jazz records on the gramophone. Especially during his boyhood, he was obsessed with the boogie-woogie rhythm.

Both he and his family were non-religious, but he developed a strong faith and on his own accord went to Rikkyo High School, which is a mission school. He had seen the 1959 movie "Ben-Hur" starring Charlton Heston (released in Japan in 1960) and was impressed by the scene where Christ by miracle cures a diseased person.



Hosono: I decided to go to a Christian high school.  
(from the book *The Story of Haruomi Hosono, King of Music*)

When he turned 15, he learned to play the guitar and formed his first band with a friend. At that time, there was a strong influence of folk music by the likes of Bob Dylan, and he already started performing his own songs. His unusual ability to digest music stems from this period. After he started playing electric bass while a student at Rikkyo University, it wasn't long before rumours about a great bassist spread throughout the university. In 1969, he was invited to go professional and debuted as a member of Apryl Fool, whose singer was Chu Kosaka. Their only album, described as "the dawn of Japanese psychedelia", was recorded in just four days. With rising expectations from those around them, the group disbanded after the concert marking the release. One of the reasons was Kosaka auditioning for the Japanese version of the rock musical "Hair" (1970) and passing to become part of the main cast. Fully-fledged rock vocalists like him, a rarity in Japan, were in high demand.

After Apryl Fool disbanded, Hosono once again asked Kosaka to join a new band, but it didn't work out, so without a full-time vocalist Happy End became a band in which the members each performed their own songs. It was formed with drummer Rei Matsumoto (or Takashi Matsumoto), Eiichi Ohtaki, and Shigeru Suzuki. Hosono being somewhat older was the leader, but Takashi Matsumoto, who would later become a lyricist, provided the concept behind the band. At a time when rock covers in English were the norm, they quickly attracted attention as the "rock band who sing in Japanese". Happy End posted a milestone in Japanese rock with their second album, "Kazemachi Roman" (1971). This "Japanese Rock", so to say, laid the foundation for today's J-Pop. At the time of the band's formation, a "Japanese rock controversy" was going on, in which they were in conflict with Yuya Uchida from the Group Sounds faction, who claimed the Japanese had no taste for rock, and as a result the way Happy End operated became a template for how to express rock in Japan.

## ■ Goodbye America, Japan, Hello Tropical

Bandleader Hosono took a next step with the "Happy End" album (1973), recorded in Los Angeles as a kind of "memorial to the band's dissolution". Here he met his new ally, Van Dyke Parks. This West Coast eccentric had been co-writing with Brian Wilson for "Smile", the discarded cult record by the Beach Boys. When recording "Sayonara America, Sayonara Nihon", written for the album by Happy End and Van Dyke Parks, Hosono for the first time experienced "techno-style recording techniques".

Hosono: Sunset Studio used to be a gathering place for hipsters, so when Van Dyke Parks heard the rumours he came over to check us out [...] Sitting in a high chair, he gave instructions to each band member. First of all, he asked Matsumoto, the drummer, to play the hi-hat every 16 beats and put in a kick, 'Boom, Don'. And just like that, the session developed, layer by layer. I had never made a song starting from a beat in the studio before, so the experience was quite unfamiliar.

(from the interview collection *A 100 Views of Hosono*)

Hosono: I guess you could say it was created in 3D, as if we were arranging clothes. In other words, in there for the first time I learned that it's possible to create something three-dimensional that is layered.  
(from Switch/issue April 2000)

One track at a time, they placed the pieces into a mosaic to complete this additional, unexpected song. And Hosono's first "techno" experience of thinking how to practice instant recording using technology fell into place.

It was only after returning from Los Angeles that he learned the true identity of Van Dyke Parks.

Hosono: As I listened more and more to his album 'Discover America', it took me back to my past. It reminded me of a world of nostalgia the way Hollywood movie music did.  
(from the book The Story of Haruomi Hosono, King of Music)

Listening to this second album by Van Dyke Parks, gorgeously orchestrated and featuring Trinidadian steel drums, Hosono recalled his childhood musical experiences. In the Hosono household, where his aunt worked as a secretary for a film distribution company, there were many records of musicals and film music from the heyday of Western movies. They displayed a fictional image of the East and the South Seas as created by Hollywood.

His investigations reached their climax in the year between the records "Tropical Dandy" and "Taian Yoko". In tandem with Eiichi Ohtaki, he expanded his musical exploration from calypso to New Orleans. Together they obtained valuable old blues singles released by Nippon Cultural Broadcasting. And listening to Dr. John's record "Gumbo" (1972), which he got to know about through Ohtaki, proved decisive in shifting Hosono's musical outlook.

Hosono: I learned about Dr. John's 'Gumbo' from Ohtaki [...] It blew me away from the start. When earlier I felt uneasy about what I wanted to do, here I thought: This is it!  
(from the liner notes to Hosono Box 1969-2000)

Gumbo is a New Orleans hodgepodge soup of stewed vegetables and seafood, thickened with okra. The record was likewise packed with the charms of indigenous and sophisticated music that conveyed the mood of this port town during the French occupation. From this he learned about Creole culture, born from a mixture of black and white settlers. Second Line, for example, was a sub-genre of R&B that originated there.

Hosono: Most of the music that I thought was good turned out to be hit songs from New Orleans [...] I realized that New Orleans music was influenced by the Caribbean [...] ...so my interest gradually spread to music of the frontiers.  
(from Pachi-Pachi Reader magazine No.3)

After returning from the Los Angeles recording, the two, still thrilled, headed off to another virtually American experience. In 1972, Hosono moved to an American house that was made available at that time. Parts of America Village, located in Sayama City in the Saitama Prefecture and featuring sizeable carpeted estates with dog-houses and huge fireplaces, were rented out by Sayama City to the public as municipal

housing after the withdrawal of the U.S. military from the Johnson Air Force Base. It was around 1971 that people involved in music and designers began to live there. So did Hosono, after hearing rumours about it from an acquaintance in the design group Workshop Mu!!.

Hosono: The rent was a little over 20,000 yen [...] Well, the place was like a commune, everyone who was in the mood for dropping out gathered there [...] Now that I think about it, it was more like a barrack. At the time, it was a very luxurious house. It had a large garden and was built in a Western style, but not very realistically.  
(from the liner notes to Hosono House)

Hosono: Young people like us who didn't have money are now able to borrow [...] In Tokyo, I could only live in a 6-tatami mat apartment.  
(from the Haruomi Hosono & Tokyo Shyness performance pamphlet)

Hosono's first solo record "Hosono House" (1973) was recorded at his residence in America Village and appeared on the Bellwood label to which Happy End were also signed. It was The Band's influence that made him do this commercial recording at home. For this, engineer Kinji Yoshino brought a 16-track tape recorder into the home studio and recordings began.

Hosono: I was influenced by The Band's 'Music from Big Pink' (1968), and I was living in a similar house [...] I went into that solo recording following a very intense experience. Hearing Little Feat's recordings, experiencing the scene of Van Dyke Parks creating sounds and so on, I'd had a kind of shock [...] The way the participants gathered and created sounds together was similar to The Band's style.  
(from the liner notes to Hosono House)

The idea for a home recording came from Hosono. Apparently his request was to "not record in a studio". For Yoshino, having to operate in a private space without soundproofing, this was an experimental attempt at recording. The 16-track Ampex recorder "MM100" was Yoshino's property, and since he was a freelancer, he had no further equipment or money, so Susumu Takashima of coffee shop Jean-Jean in Shibuya stepped in to raise the sum of 30 million yen as working capital. Shigeru Suzuki, Tatsuo Hayashi, Masataka Matsutoya and Hosono, the four men who participated in the recording of Hosono House, formed a pseudo-band called Caramel Mama. They later expanded and became the more familiar Tin Pan Alley. After the intensity of his experience with Van Dyke Parks, Hosono's next solo album, "Tropical Dandy" (1975), was his first release at the next record company, but this time it was not a group effort.

By the way, Eiichi Ohtaki, who was keeping up with Hosono at that time, moved to Fussa near Tokyo, the site of another former U.S. military base, and likewise deepened his musical knowledge by listening to the U.S. military channel FEN. He became famous as a Japanese customer buying lots of records via mail order from the United States, on such a regular basis that people said, "Are you going to become a record store?", but during his lifetime he never actually went to live in America. The youth of that era were very active in making such moves. Many Japanese guitarists went to the United States, taking along their warrior attitudes. But instead of gaining

this ultimate experience and be deceived by it, Ohtaki pursued the secrets of sound in his own way. According to Bellwood's director Koki Miura, in order to achieve that American sound of yesteryear, Ohtaki, after performing his own research, went to the pressing plant and tried changing the composition of the vinyl chloride material, etc. He refurbished his house in Fussa as a studio, apparently because of his statement that, "We cannot reproduce the sound of Western music in a Japanese studio". He continued to study American rock, astonishing American music journalists as a result. Now it became "Goodbye America, Japan, hello Tropical".

Inspired by the real America, the two of them embarked on a journey of Pax Americana in their minds. A virtual America. However, by that time the real America had already lost that culture.

## ■ "Tropical Dandy"

Hosono's second solo album, called "Tropical Dandy" and released in 1975, captures this development and change. Influenced by latin and calypso, he explored ethnic routes such as Second Line, Samba, and Baião. The song "Chattanooga Choo Choo" was inspired by a cover of it by Carmen Miranda, a Brazilian diva who went to America and became a successful singer around the world. According to his handwritten liner notes, his interests shifted to the Caribbean, leaving America behind. Hosono, after listening to Carmen Miranda, was nicknamed "Tropical Dandy" by Makoto Kubota, leader of the Sunset Gang at the time.

Makoto Kubota: Hosono liked Brazilian samba singer and Hollywood star Carmen Miranda, as well as the exotic roles of 1940s singer and actress Dorothy Lamour [...] So when I said: You're a tropical dandy, aren't you? - that became the title of his album. (from the book Visiting the Sounds of the World)

Hosono: At the time, I was doing funky stuff as a bass player, so I thought the next solo album after 'Hosono House' would be something like that. But when I sang over this funky sound, my voice didn't match the image of the song at all. When around that time Kubota came to visit, he saw me worrying and said: Hosono-san is tropical, isn't he? (from the Natalie/Hosono seminar - panel 2 part 1)

Yasuo Yagi designed the cover for "Tropical Dandy", which featured a drawing inspired by Procol Harum's album "A Salty Dog" (1969). After getting the name for the album from Kubota, Hosono named his musical style "Soy Sauce Music". This hinted at the latin music that was popular in New York called "salsa" (which is Spanish for sauce).

Soy sauce instead of regular sauce, and American ingredients used in Japanese recipes. In an essay, Hosono wrote that his music was like Katsudon, stir-fried Reba Nira, and Okinawan taco rice all mixed together. However, this was a bit too much for fans who bought it expecting something like Happy End or "Hosono House".

Hosono: I think we probably started with 'Peking Duck' [...] And, I guess we did 'Silk Road' right afterwards [...] In the end, with this album, I was able to do everything I

wanted to do on the A-side [...] That's why I threw away the B-side (laughs) [...] Actually, it wouldn't have mattered if the B side had been completely blank.  
(from the book *Harry Hosono, the Crown Years 1974-1977*)

From the start however, the B-side was accepted by the public. For a while, until YMO arrived, Hosono's albums were structured so that the front and back sides of his records were separated like "yin and yang".

Hosono: Whenever I release an album, as is the case with my recent 'Tropical Dandy', I'm always in the middle of a process.  
(from the essay collection *Stairway to the Horizon*)

All the same, his unique musical outlook won him a wide range of fans, and "Tropical Dandy" became a hit, selling 30,000 copies. At that time, a total of 100,000 folk records or 20,000 rock records were said to mark the bottom line in terms of sales. So it significantly surpassed the nominal sales result of 10,000 copies for Happy End's "Kazemachi Roman" during the time they were active.

## ■ "Uncle Haisai" and Rediscovering Martin Denny

Makoto Kubota, who had given him the hint for "Tropical Dandy", became Hosono's guide to exotica. From a postcard sent by Kubota during his travels in 1974, he learned about "Uncle Haisai" by Shoukichi Kina and Champloose, a local hit in Okinawa.

Hosono: Just before I made *Tropical Dandy*, Makoto Kubota sent me a picture postcard. Apparently he'd gone off to Taketomi Island and casually wrote: When I got on the (sightseeing) bus, some amazing music was playing.  
(from the interview collection *A 100 Views of Hosono*)

Kubota: Masanaga Kina was Shoukichi's father. A cassette of Masanaga-san's folk songs happened to be playing [...] His son Shoukichi added only two songs, but I was surprised when I heard them [...] One of them was 'Uncle Haisai' [...] I went to Marufuku Records and asked them if they had any records, and they brought out three or four copies and I bought them all, to give as souvenirs to Haruomi Hosono and others. I didn't receive a reply from anyone, apart from Hosono, he was the only one to respond.  
(from the book *Visiting the Sounds of the World*)

Hosono: At the time, I used to listen to a lot of music from the Caribbean and other islands, so my mood connected with Okinawa without feeling out of place.  
(from *Paper Sky/no.16*)

New Orleans and Okinawa are connected by the "beat of the waves" across the ocean. Okinawa island, which had just been returned to Japan, offered the most familiar exotica.

Hosono: Japan also has music comparable to the Caribbean and New Orleans [...] This music made me feel: Japan has exotica too!  
(from the interview collection *A 100 Views of Hosono*)

Such fateful events kept on happening.

Hosono: It was the day after I talked to Kubota [...] When I went to the editorial department, Tadashi Tanaka, who was sitting next to me, suddenly said: Hosono-san, your elegant Chinese way is great.  
(from the essay collection *Stairway to the Horizon*)

When he dropped by the editorial department of the music magazine "Light Music" (published by the Yamaha Music Foundation) in which Hosono wrote a series of essays, he was met by Tadashi Tanaka. "Chinese Elegance" is the phrase Tanaka coined, referring to Hosono's taste in music. Hosono has said this was a key phrase, which gave him the power to push ahead in music.

He was also reunited with the music of Martin Denny through a tape given to him by Tanaka, who had been familiar with Caribbean and South American music from the start.

Hosono: Just when I was desperate for a bird cry that fitted the image of the song 'Tropical Night', the name Martin Denny suddenly came to mind. At the time I was just starting out on my bizarre approach to oriental exoticism, and Martin Denny's music was sufficiently great to push me down this bizarre path even more seriously.  
(from the essay collection *Stairway to the Horizon*)

Hosono: All of a sudden, I remembered listening to Martin Denny when I was in elementary school. S-Ken (Tadashi Tanaka) gave me a Martin Denny cassette he'd copied from illustrator Yosuke Kawamura's collection, and it turned my world upside down.

(from the book *Haruomi Hosono and his Time*)

For his next solo album "Taian Yoko" (1976), he picked up "Hong Kong Blues" composed by Hoagy Carmichael. This referenced Martin Denny's version, not the one used as a Hollywood movie theme. The tell-tale sign had been there in "Tropical Night", the first recorded track for Tropical Dandy. He'd discovered Martin Denny as part of the Hawaiian cool jazz he heard on the radio during his childhood. US magazine "Esquire" used to feature stereo record advertisements, and the audio on them was said to be one of the three sacred treasures for single men. Cool jazz records with sexy local beauties on their covers portrayed Oceania and Hawaii as "South Seas paradises". This exotica boom overlapped with Hollywood's heyday in the 1930s and 40s. The track "Hurricane Dorothy" was inspired by the 1937 film about the South Seas called "The Hurricane", starring Dorothy Lamour. Hosono said that after this intense experience of exotica, he could no longer listen to ordinary music. Through that intoxicating all-natural colour and sound experience, his consciousness expanded, the way psychedelic rock had done earlier.

Hosono: Martin Denny is the music that changed my constitution. Even in Tokyo, I felt crazy when I heard his carefree 'Sake Rock', something that Japanese people could never create.

(from the book *Hosono Sightseeing 1969-2019*)

Martin Denny's music is typical of Hawaii, where many Japanese Americans live, in whom it inspired a longing for their homeland Japan. Hosono said the influence of Denny changed his musical outlook. While also taking tropical exoticism as the

starting point, but unlike his experience with Van Dyke Parks, it asked questions of Japanese people's identity.

Hosono: A lot of aspects of Japan that I'd viewed as negative began to appear in a different light. They became interesting. For the first time I was observing things through the eyes of a stranger. After that, I could not listen to ordinary pop music anymore.

(from the book Hosono Sightseeing 1969-2019)

Hosono: It was like Discover Tokyo, a rediscovery. It was exciting and interesting.  
(from the interview collection The Endless Talking)

He subsequently discovered that the (pentatonic) scale called "yonanuki" in Japan and used in Denny's "Sake Rock" (1959) had something in common with "Uncle Haisai", that Okinawan music from far across the sea in Japan.

Hosono: I hadn't really been conscious of this until I was informed about it (by Tadashi Tanaka), even though I had been listening to what is now called Mondo-esque music [...] I realized I was facing a dilemma because I was trying to express myself within the narrow range of rock only.

(from the book Ambient Driver)

Hosono: Ever since Happy End, my world had felt uncomfortable. I like Japan, but it doesn't work when I play music. I always feel cultural friction. It still haunts me, but back then it was the exotica sound that turned things on their head.

(from the interview collection A 100 Views of Hosono)

During the Happy End era, Takashi Matsumoto had armed them with a theory about "Japanese rock", but apparently throughout this time Hosono had felt uncomfortable with it. Some kind of suspicion hung over Japanese people doing rock music. However, with "Tropical Dandy" his sound had not yet changed. Immediately after its completion, Hosono took part in the recording in Hawaii of Makoto Kubota & The Sunset Gang's "Hawaii Champroo" (1975), which proved to be a next turning point.

Another close sympathizer was his Tin Pan Alley colleague Shigeru Suzuki. After returning from recording with Happy End in Los Angeles, the two became obsessed with Van Dyke Parks' "Discover America". Suzuki also began collecting SP records. Following the Los Angeles recording of his "Band Wagon" (1975), Shigeru Suzuki's album "Lagoon" was recorded in Hawaii in parallel with "Hawaii Champroo". Hosono claims he was much encouraged when "Band Wagon" had produced good sales totaling 30,000 copies.

There was a close parallel between the resort music boom and the tropical music boom. Around this same time, Masayoshi Takanaka, who was part of the band Sadistics, also devoted himself to fusion. The intro of his track "Blue Lagoon" (1980) for example was inspired by the song "Bali Ha'i", the way it had featured in the movie "South Pacific" (1958), which was also the source of Hosono's tropical roots.

## ■ Club Nisei Orchestra and "Taian Yoko"

During the recording of "Hawaii Champroo", Hosono and Kubota visited record stores around Hawaii to buy used Martin Denny records for 25 cents. During this treasure hunt, Kubota discovered a record by the Club Nisei Orchestra. Originally, Hawaii was developed by settlers from Hiroshima and Okinawa, setting up sugar cane fields and sugar refining industries. Apparently, in their heyday about 120,000 Japanese emigrants lived there, and even today they account for around 40% of the population. Often used as a location for Hollywood movies, its show business activities have long led the field. This record was actually recorded in Hawaii in the 1950s, when some of the children of Japanese immigrants became singers. Many of their songs expressed a longing for their homeland, and "Sayonara the Japanese Farewell Song" ("Taian Yoko") was also included on this album.

Hosono: There was a movie called 'M★A★S★H'. It has this song popping up [...] At that time, I was collecting a lot of versions of 'Sayonara'. Without any context. I didn't research it, I just collected all the records containing 'Sayonara' that I could find. The most interesting version was on the weird record they put out in Hawaii. It was among the souvenir records purchased by Makoto Kubota, and it was credited to a set of performers called Club Nisei Orchestra. Various Japanese singers are singing 'Otomi-san' and American standards, and 'Sayonara' is included as well. It's called 'Japanese Farewell Song' [...] It has the same arrangement as in 'M★A★S★H'.

(from the interview collection *The Endless Talking*)

Arthur Lyman's "Otome San" (a cover of the version by Hachiro Kasuga) was also popular after the war. Martin Denny's exotica sound was all the rage in the late 1950s.

While in Hawaii, Hosono acquired a sanshin (actually a guitar modified to look like a sanshin) at an antique shop in Chinatown, Honolulu. Taking it back with him, he used it to record "Chocho-San" on the "Taian Yoko" record.

Hosono: I often went to Chinatown for meals, and there was an antique shop next to my favourite Chinese restaurant, and it had an instrument that looked like an Okinawan sanshin displayed in the show window.

(from *Paper Sky*/no.14)

Hosono and Kubota were fascinated by the records of this second-generation Japanese orchestra. "Taian Yoko", "Japanese Rhumba" and "Asatoya Yunta", recorded for "Paraiso" (during 1977), are all covers of songs that featured on those records. Influenced by all this, he now created this fictional alter ego called Harry Hosono with a similar second-generation Japanese American feel. He completely immersed himself in this imaginary character. He is credited as such as a producer on "Hawaii Champroo" (1975), and also used the name for his Chinatown live gig featuring solo repertoire on 8 May 1976. This character was supposed to be a musician of unknown nationality with an oriental face. As a model Hosono cited Arihiro Fujimura, who played Chinese villains speaking poor Japanese in the Nikkatsu action movies of the 1950s. Before the comedian Tamori started out, Fujimura was already known for the



art of inventing bogus foreign languages, and originally he was a comedian too. Hosono grew up watching the comedy of that era by performers such as Tony Tani, Frankie Sakai and Rookie Shinichi.

During the GS (Group Sounds) period, the Golden Cups band-members were marketed using the fictional line "all members are half-bred". Operating under that kind of guise of mixed ethnicity made it easier to do rock music. It was, so to speak, a means for "Japanese people to rock", which at its root was the same as "rock in Japanese". This was not even the first time that "fiction" had been employed. And Happy End often visually quoted the poor comics in "Garo" magazine, even though all members except for Ohtaki were from wealthy middle-class families. So it was ironic they used "a bimbo is just there for the looks". Hosono had long hair and a beard when he debuted, but that was just the fashion of the time, and during high school he'd been a neat student wearing an ivy league look.

The period under American rule from 1945 to 1952 as defined by the San Francisco Peace Treaty, immediately after the defeat in World War II, was called "Occupied Japan" (meaning Japan was under occupation. "Occupied Japan" was written in passports). This name can still be heard on compilation CDs such as "Exotic Japan - Orientalism In Occupied Japan". Hosono was born in 1947 and therefore grew up after the war, but he has vivid memories of the scenery in Tokyo during the occupation. Later Hosono mentioned that on "Technopolis", when he sang "TO-KI-O" instead of "TO-KYO", this reminded him of the road signs put up by the U.S. military during the period of occupation, not the word used in Italian, German and Spanish for "Tokyo".

## ■ Meeting Ryuichi Sakamoto at a Concert in Chinatown

A version of "Peking Duck" was recorded to be released as a single and, to promote it, a "Tin Pan Alley in Chinatown" event was held on 8 May 1976 at a new building in Chinatown, Yokohama. The performing credits read Harry Hosono & Tin Pan Alley. Hosono performed as a marimba player, not as bassist. In addition to the songs on the album, they for the first time performed "Firecracker" in honour of Martin Denny (which he'd recorded in 1958 for his album "Quiet Village"). Ryuichi Sakamoto participated in this event, substituting for Hiroshi Sato. He was hastily brought in by Yoshiro Nagato, Sato's manager at the time, because the event did not fit his schedule.

Yoshiro Nagato: I became friends with Sakamoto at Ogikubo Loft [...] When I was still working as a staff member for Sugar Babe, he was doing backing work for Masato Tomobe and Rabi Nakayama. Anyway he had good sense of performance.

Hosono: (I've since learned) there was a rumour about him? There's a very talented musician who's performing in Asagaya or someplace? [...] I had no contact with him at all. However, rumour had it he was very good at playing keyboards, and I think he was working as an arranger for Tabo (Taeko Onuki)'s album ('Grey Skies'), maybe that's why we approached him.

(from the book Harry Hosono, the Crown Years 1974-1977)

In April 1976, Hosono released his third solo album "Taian Yoko"<sup>2</sup>, arguably the culmination of his research on exotica. The slogan that accompanied it was: from "Soy Sauce Music" to "Chunky Sound". This made-up word combined chanko with funky, as derived from Chanko Nabe, a Japanese hodgepodge dish similar to "Gumbo".

Hiroshi Sato's contribution to this album is great, starting with the piano on "Hong Kong Blues" (by Hoagy Carmichael), and digesting elements of Okinawa, New Orleans and boogie-woogie to support the sound. "Sayonara the Japanese Farewell Song" is a cover of the Club Nisei Orchestra track mentioned above. This album was created in the lingering afterglow of the Hawaii experience. "Chocho-San" was based on the boogie-woogie of New Orleans, and was completed with a sanshin and Ryukyu choir, with Hosono himself playing the sanshin, his souvenir from Hawaii.

Hosono: Initially, it was for the Sadistic Mika Band. I had asked to write a song for them [...] I used Mika's image for it. For the words [...] I couldn't complete the song on time. Then I gave up and sang it myself, and that's how it turned out.  
(from NHK-FM "Young Echo"/14 February 1978)

Its comic touch was apparently influenced by the novelty songs he listened to in the past, such as those by Martin Denny, The Three Suns, and Eartha Kitt. The track "Roochoo Gumbo", which includes the phrase "Uncle Haisai", has a mysterious rhythm as if someone's hitting a Mokugyo drum (a "wooden fish"). Hosono called this the "one beat".

Hosono: Starting with 'Tropical Dandy', I was getting more and more into my roots and breaking out of rock [...] We were calling it Grandpa's Rhythm.  
(from J-Wave Daisyworld/broadcast 8 May 2000)

Tatsuo Hayashi: The Mokugyo beat doesn't need to proceed one-by-one. Alternatively, you can put in double beats or triple beats. The melody and atmosphere will determine whether you play the one beat for 8 minutes or divide it into triple beats. But you're free to continue as one, one, one [...] I kept the rhythm in one beat all the time. That's why after it was over, I was completely exhausted given the mood of these songs.  
(remembering Taian Yoko)

"Grandpa's Rhythm" means "one time beat", and Hayashi named it after the lyrics featured in "Pom Pom Steam": "If you play along smoothly along with Grandpa's Rhythm it'll be like the harbour lights in the night breeze". Of course, it's not a musical term generally used.

Hosono: Back in Tin Pan Alley, I discovered the secret of rock's rhythm [...] You can understand it by listening to the transition from 4-beat to 8-beat, such as in 'Rock

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<sup>2</sup> Translator's note: "Taian Yoko" is the original Japanese title of this album. It is the name of a department store Hosono noticed when visiting Nagasaki, the hometown of Yoshiro Nagato, the manager of Tin Pan Alley. Because the cover illustration shows the text "Bon Voyage co." (and the label "Bon Voyage"), outside Japan it is often listed as or referred to by this name. However, this is a secondary title at best. Throughout this book the correct and original title "Taian Yoko" is used.

Around the Clock' by Bill Haley & His Comets [...] It's a rhythm that doesn't jump [...] In fact, it is also the basis of boogie-woogie. But not many rock musicians noticed it at the time [...] I taught drummer Tatsuo Hayashi the secret of this Grandpa Rhythm.  
(from the book *Ambient Driver*)

For Hosono, who was earning half his income as a session musician at that time, this funky secret was a trade secret, like a patent.

The package features a fictional film setting from a fictitious homegrown American music label "CROWN" by Yasuo Yagi, who continued to be in charge of the artwork at the request of Hosono. It has many stills of his fictional second-generation Japanese-American alter ego Harry Hosono, who is the subject of the film, and is said to be playing a fake foreigner with twisted feelings.

It sold 20,000 copies. So it's not that "Taian Yoko" suffered poor sales. Hosono felt frustrated not because of these sales results, but because of the lack of understanding of the musicians around him. Makoto Kubota and Tatsuro Yamashita, who participated in the chorus, were highly praised, apparently the others were "odd". Two years later, Eiichi Ohtaki's "Let's Ondo Again" (1978) had a "ritualistic"<sup>3</sup> feel to it. Both records were dismissed as novelty music. And Taeko Onuki, who participated in the chorus of "Roochoo Gumbo", had received a warning that the mood during the recording sessions was "scary". Furthermore, his ally Shigeru Suzuki also noticed he had nothing in common with rock music, and had gradually lost his fever for 1950s America. Although he was very active on "Taian Yoko", on the next album "Paraiso" (1978) he only participated in two songs.

Hosono: After 'Taian Yoko' everyone ran away really. People who had listened to 'Hosono House' fled the scene at full speed. That's why I felt like there was no one around.

(from the book *Haruomi Hosono and his Time*)

## ■ The Formation of Tin Pan Alley

This story goes back to when Hosono was on Bellwood, the folk label of King Records. When recording first solo album "Hosono House", Haruomi Hosono and Shigeru Suzuki, in need of some backing members, approached Tatsuo Hayashi and Masataka Matsutoya, who were in Chu Kosaka's band Four Joe Half. In 1973 the four of them formed Caramel Mama. Hosono came up with this name, which relates to an episode in which a mother of a student brought in caramel as a treat for her child, to calm her mind when members of the University of Tokyo Zenkyoto student protest organization had barricaded themselves in the Yasuda Auditorium.

Caramel Mama was born as a group of studio operators with a strong focus on music, out of admiration for overseas teams doing the same. They aimed to be a

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<sup>3</sup> Translator's note: this refers to the uniquely Japanese concepts of "Ke" and "Hare", which have to do with the distinction between the mundane reality of everyday life versus the more formal festive occasions and rituals.

Japanese version of the Muscle Shoals studio team, famous for their work with Paul Simon, or The Section, James Taylor's backing band, or Stuff featuring Steve Gadd.

Hosono: I really like the role of bassist, and playing bass has become interesting. Playing has become fun again. This is a reaction to Happy End. I'm back again.  
(from guts magazine/issue January 1973)

When I interviewed Fuyumi Iwasawa, who was in charge of arranging Bread & Butter's single "Pink Shadow" (1974), and is said to be the pioneer of Japanese funk, he told me he couldn't have performed an analysis of the 16-beat song structure they were using when they were recording. It was a "trade secret", even for this group of professional musicians called Caramel Mama.

Hosono: When I was in Caramel Mama I started to feel like a craftsman [...] I really liked Tatsuo Hayashi's drumming and thought he was a genius. Of course, Shigeru Suzuki was also called a boy genius at the time, so it was a pleasure just to be able to play with them.  
(from the book Rock Chronicle Japan vol.1 1968-1980)

At that time, soul music was emerging in the American popular music world. Records on labels like Motown, Atlantic and Stax were more about far-out sounds than songs. Speaking of Muscle Shoals in Alabama, after the Sadistic Mika Band disbanded, Kazuhiko Kato recorded his first solo record "What Happens Next?" there.

Hosono: If I'd wanted to, I think I could have left one recording with Caramel, but it wasn't just a band issue, one of the main reasons was that we weren't able to go straight into recording, due to various problems such as the overall environment, the record company, and the production.  
(from The Dig/Japanese City Pop issue)

The first plan was for a duo concept, which Hosono offered to Hayashi. But Hayashi formed his own group, Bamboo, and put more emphasis on that. He spent a lot of time on Bamboo, but was able to participate in sessions for Hosono's solo album. After that, the way forward was to reorganize Caramel Mama as a proper band. They participated in works including the three albums by Yumi Arai up to "Cobalt Hour" (1975), Izumi Yukimura and Caramel Mama's "Super Generation" (1974), Minako Yoshida's "Winter Door" (1973), Minami Masato's "Minami Masato First Record" (1973) and others. In popular music they took on a role similar to that of black-clothed (invisible) stagehands, as a means of becoming widely heard. They pushed forward the "Westernization" of Japanese pop music, which continues to this day. In the summer of 1974 they started calling themselves Tin Pan Alley, named after the area on 28th Avenue in New York City where musical instrument stores and music publishers gathered. Going from the amateur days of Caramel Mama to the professionalism of Tin Pan Alley, they made a wish to become a Hit Factory, in which popular music publishers would concentrate. They came up with this Brill Building type vision, which meant that the work each member of the quartet received as a producer was backed by the whole band. Requiring some expansion, in addition to Akiko Suzuki (Akiko Yano) and Hiroshi Sato, they were also joined by Motoya Hamaguchi and Nobu Saito.

In 1975, Chu Kosaka and Minako Yoshida were invited as guest vocalists on what proved to be their first and only tour. Its purpose was to promote Shigeru Suzuki's "Band Wagon" and Chu Kosaka's "Horo" (both released in 1975), also performing were the band Huckleback, formed to show-case Shigeru Suzuki's "Band Wagon". Among them was Hiroshi Sato, who had just moved to Tokyo from Osaka. Masataka Matsutoya quit just before the tour. He was replaced by John Yamazaki of Bamboo, who also played on Tin Pan Alley's record "Caramel Mama" (1975).

## ■ Transfer to Crown

At this point I need to write about Crown Records, which Tin Pan Alley belonged to, because I think it's important. In 1963, Masanori Ito, a former executive of Nippon Columbia, founded Japan's first "independent record company without a pressing plant or own studio" with staff, exclusive writers, and singers such as Saburo Kitajima and Kiyoko Suizenji. It marked the beginning of the so-called label. A family dispute in parent company Hitachi Group, which led to the staff feuding against each other, turned into a big scandal, and formed the basis of the novel "Troubadour" (1966) by Hiroyuki Itsuki, later also a TV drama. Its main character, Ryuzo Koenji, was based on music director Genzo Mabuchi, who became the spiritual father of Panam. Panam was established in 1970 as a label for the folk generation. With a background in public relations, Susumu Tanaka, the head of the advertising department's broadcasting section, auditioned Kosetsu Minami to be its debut artist member. Since Minami belonged to Yui Music Management, with acts like Kaguyahime, Kaze, Iruka, etc., Panam in effect became Yui's label. Next Tanaka was introduced to Caramel Mama's manager, Takashi Kuwahara, by Yui's Shunichi Jinyama, probably because Masataka Matsutoya was supporting Takuro Yoshida. As a result, in October 1974 Tin Pan Alley signed a contract with Panam. So they made their debut as part of Crown, the record company for enka music. Similar to Eiichi Ohtaki's Niagara label beginning its history with Elec, a folk label on the brink of bankruptcy, there probably wasn't any other record company out there that would release experimental records. Hits such as Kaguyahime's "Kanda River" (1973/total sales 2 million copies) and Iruka's "Remnants of Snow" (1975/total sales 800,000 copies) supported Panam's sales, and using these proceeds as a source of funding, some experimentation was allowed.

Susumu Tanaka: Kosetsu Minami asked with a look of disbelief: Tanaka-san, is it true that Crown signed a contract with Tin Pan Alley? upon which Panda Yamada declared: That is a lie, Hosono-san is not going to be part of Crown [...] Since the debut of Kosetsu Minami, we have continued our painstaking efforts to maintain a folk direction in the face of some pretty dire times [...] After these enka clowns started getting involved in new music, their sense of solidarity has grown ever stronger.  
(from Tin Pan Alley News No.1)

Actually, Hosono's entry into the label was warmly welcomed by the senior artists on Panam. The fact that Kosetsu Minami, who was a hot seller at the time, participated in "Silk Road" on "Tropical Dandy" is a testament to his welcome. In return, Tin Pan

Alley participated as backing band on Kosetsu Minami's first solo album "The Way Back" (1975). This album, on which Hosono played bass, reached number 2 on the Oricon chart.

Masayuki Kuniyoshi (or Seiji Kuniyoshi), who had worked hard to invite Tin Pan Alley, now became their director at Crown. First up for release was Tin Pan Alley single "Theme from Yoimachigusa" (recorded in 1974 as the theme song for the Nikkatsu movie directed by Tatsumi Kumashiro), and variations of it were used on Hosono's solo album "Tropical Dandy" ("Theme from Yoimachigusa" and single B-side "Winter Meeting" were adapted for "Floating Diary" and "Three O'Clock Lullaby", respectively). In a good way, it was all left up to the artists. From this point onward, the approach split in two directions: Tin Pan Alley's Muscle Shoals-like urban sound, and Hosono's highly fictional exotic music as Harry Hosono. In 1974, Crown Records built an in-house studio (Studio 1) in Roppongi, equipped with state-of-the-art facilities designed by Nittobo Acoustic Engineering.

Seiji Kuniyoshi: Until that point, they were recording in external studios such as Hikokan, Mouri (currently Mouri Artworks Studio), and Aoi Studio.

Shinichi Tanaka: There was a small studio for vocals on the second floor. I think there were two actually. Since Columbia and King had their own studios, I thought it would be better if we also had an orchestra recording studio. If we built it in Tameike, we probably weren't able to record enka at the same time, still it was better than nothing. (from the Moonriders in the Crown Years 40th Anniversary Box)

Main engineer Shinichi Tanaka joined Crown in 1969. After becoming a freelancer in 1977, he established Super Studio (later Superb). He became deeply involved with Hosono, Sakamoto, and Takahashi when Agent Consipio was founded. Since there were no senior engineers to guide him, Yutaka Goto, the producer with Yui Music Management, and Kenichi Makimura, who was at Yui Music Publishing at the time, taught him how to record music Western-style.

Iruka and Kaguyahime used the studio during the day, and Hosono used it at night. Hosono's late-night recording habit started around this time, the extra time was not counted because the studio could be used free of charge as long as a slip was submitted. According to Susumu Tanaka's notes, completing "Tropical Dandy" was postponed many times, and it took half a year to finish. However, according to Shinichi Tanaka, the 100 hours "Tropical" took was quick, by the 1980s the standard had become 400 hours. Within Crown Records, these long-haired Panam employees were treated as hippies, and hated by the suits parade in charge of enka. The biggest problem was Hosono's habit of being late. 3 hours late was already on the verge, but it went up to 8 hours even. And all that time Tin Pan Alley and Akiko Yano had to sit around and wait.

There was no policy of paying late-night fees to engineers, and even though he applied for it with the company, it was not approved, so Shinichi Tanaka became independent as a freelance engineer, which at that time was still quite rare. During the Happy End era, Takashi Matsumoto's lyrics were used as blueprints, but back then the process was to create something out of nothing, it was impossible to keep track of time, and the complete blueprint was only in Hosono's head.

In November 1975 "Caramel Mama" was the first full album to appear under the Tin Pan Alley moniker. The four members each produced two songs, with the rest recorded by the band. Those who participated were not limited to these four people, and they recorded separately from the beginning like The Beatles did on their "White Album". Yoshitaka Minami provided vocals, Yumi Arai wrote one track, and Sugar Babe participated in the chorus. Hosono used Hiroshi Sato instead of Matsutoya, and Tsugutoshi Goto added slap bass to "Chopper's Boogie", a typical song written by Tatsuo Hayashi. The album includes "Yellow Magic Carnival", one in a series of songs with a Chinese theme along with "Silk Road" and "Peking Duck", which was mostly done by Hosono on his own. As it turned out, the record became a hit, selling 40,000 copies, so they went on to record "Tin Pan Alley 2" (1977). This album features a number of covers of songs by the likes of Yosui Inoue, Takuro Yoshida, Agnes Chan, and Kaguyahime.

Hosono: The guys in Tin Pan Alley were full of motivation as musicians [...] I thought it was a place where I could express my ideas as a musician, rather than having to elaborately craft them.

(from the book *Harry Hosono, the Crown Years 1974-1977*)

Half of the album is instrumental, and some of it features a Shigeru Suzuki guitar solo using the Talking Wah pedal. Part of it sounds like a blueprint for YMO. Yumi Arai's "Logbook" (recorded in 1975 for "Cobalt Hour") is covered in the style of Dr. Buzzard's Original Savannah Band, and in this dance song the synth takes the lead (as it did in Yumi's version, but here arranged by Hosono, not Matsutoya). The sound is much closer to YMO than on "Paraiso" (1978), and the marimba can be heard as well. Before making her proper debut as a singer, vocalist Manna also secretly appeared on a few songs. In fact, behind the scenes, she with Tatsuo Hayashi and Hosono were planning to form a new band.

In 1975, Yosui Inoue's "World of Ice" sold 1 million copies. It became Japan's first million-selling album, ushering in a new era in music. The seeds of the "Westernization" of Japanese pop music had been sown, and in 1976, the value of the total domestic product of music releases surpassed 200 billion yen. Tin Pan Alley had a great influence on Yumi Arai's breakthrough. But unlike the Eagles venturing out from being Linda Ronstadt's backing band and Toto out of a Boz Scaggs session, Tin Pan Alley did not break through because they were too disorganized.

## ■ Tin Pan Alley's Premature "Producer Focus"

Ever since the days of Tin Pan Alley, the title "producer" appears frequently in Hosono's remarks. The history of the overseas music business shows a great admiration for producers, inspired by famous examples such as Ahmet Ertegun, Phil Spector, George Martin, and Phil Ramone. But in his mind, things were still rather vague at first.

Hosono's forerunner, Eiichi Ohtaki, expressed his admiration for Phil Spector and was aiming for that kind of Western sound. He moved to Fussa and in 1974 remodeled his home to create the "Fussa 45 Studio", meanwhile also setting up the

Niagara label. Listening to his first solo record "Niagara Moon" (1975) on that label, Hosono said he was "bowled over" by its wonderful assimilation of the New Orleans sound. However, after releasing two albums, Sugar Babe's "Songs" (1975) and "Niagara Moon", distributor Elec Records went bankrupt. Ohtaki moved to Nippon Columbia to release "Niagara Triangle Vol.1" (1976), and witnessed the end of two bands, Tatsuro Yamashita's Sugar Babe and Ginji Ito's Gomanohae. He lost confidence due to the poor sales of "Niagara Calendar" (1977), a work he was quite proud of, and his contract was terminated after "Let's Ondo Again" (1978). He also closed down "Fussa 45 Studio".

During that time, Hosono was active as a popular session musician, which earned him a living. An opportunity to cross genres arose when Caramel Mama worked with Agnes Chan. In February 1974, they received a request from Kenji Kizaki of Watanabe Music Publishing, and the result, "Agnes's Little Diary" (1974) is said to be one of the first Kayokyoku (popular music) records with the sound of a band on it.

Masataka Matsutoya: At that time, the arrangements of popular songs were all written and recorded by a few arrangers and a small number of studio musicians. The first time I came into contact with the world of popular song was when I participated in the recording featuring Agnes, I think that was the first time the sound of a band that wasn't the result of a notated score came into the world (of popular songs), other than in folk music.

(from Rock Gaho 14)

In the early days of Kayokyoku, a score was notated, and most of the drum fills and guitar solos were written in the score. Anyone who could read music and play correctly could get the job done, they mostly consisted of jazz musicians playing part-time. Tin Pan Alley, Sadistics, and others were part of the first generation to record using only chord charts. The rock feeling they brought in was much appreciated. They also imported their own gadgets such as phase shifters and fuzzboxes. In the world of INPEG (the agency that used to coordinate the booking of musicians, whose name was derived from "inspecting"), the "first call" was shifting from jazz musicians to rock musicians. Hosono was regularly "called first", but he did not like this lifestyle of having to hire a few roadies (equipment haulers, also known as "boya") to help get him to the top.

The market price at that time was 5,000 yen per session. Not per hour. In interviews I've heard this amount mentioned multiple times, which after the session was handed out by the coordinator cash-in-hand (i.e. a cash payment on the day). Since the payment from the sales of the record company was transferred only after the record had been released, it was customary for the coordinator to hand over the record first, after deducting the handling fee. There was no ranking, both jazz cats and rockers were treated the same. This work could even be done by people who were not able to read music. They were earning a living by doing this many times a day. Producer credits already existed, but compensation for producers was still a distant dream. The arrangement on the spot was included in the performance fee. Since the market price was fixed, your earnings only increased by spending more time doing these jobs.

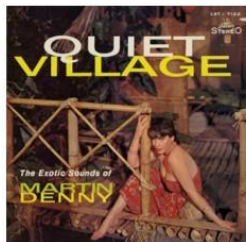


Kuwahara Music Office, Tin Pan Alley's company and set up by Takashi Kuwahara, was independent from Kazetoshi, Happy End's management company. During the Kazetoshi era, they had a charismatic manager called Shinzo Ishiura, but Happy End being non-political disliked his political activities. Kuwahara was not a powerful salesperson. Apparently Hosono asked him to be their manager believing him to be the exact opposite of Shinzo Ishiura. After retiring from the industry, Kuwahara became famous as an illustrator.

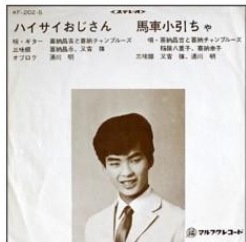
It was in the latter half with Kazetoshi that they started producing master tapes. A label called Showboat label was launched under the wings of Trio Records, and they were given an advance of 10 million yen on the condition they would release four albums a year but, spending too much time on finishing only two albums, Yoshitaka Minami's "Skyscraper Heroine" and Minako Yoshida's "Winter Door" (both released in 1973), they ran out of money. According to Kuwahara, a jazz player could finish his work in 30 minutes a day, but Tin Pan Alley didn't make money because they spent more than 3 hours on it. So it was the way they operated that made it costly. Although money did come in, everyone was worrying about the future, and it was Masataka Matsutoya who dropped out first. Apparently he started writing lyrics for popular songs because of the late payment of his salary by Kazetoshi. His monthly salary of 50,000 yen had been delayed for half a year, and when he consulted with the company about wanting to become a lyricist, they refused.

The idea of being a producer emerged as a middle ground between Hosono's dreams about music and real life. It was nothing more than an aspiration that had no place in Japan yet.

Hosono: I thought I had to complete something by the time I turned 30 [...] I thought I had to find my place in society and be successful in order to keep making good music. For the first time, I was thinking that way.  
(from the book The Story of Haruomi Hosono, King of Music)



Martin Denny's record "Quiet Village" (1958), which includes "Sake Rock" and "Firecracker"



Shoukichi Kina and Champloose's record "Uncle Haisai", Marufuku Records Edition (Original)