



"Energy" ...the new release by Goh Kurosawa  
by Travis Rogers, Jr. (The Jazz Owl)

It has been often said that to listen to Goh Kurosawa is to force oneself to abandon any notion of category or genre. While it is true that he flows effortlessly between flamenco, jazz, rock, samba and even classical, it should not be said that Goh has not firmly planted his flag in the fabled land of jazz. It should not be mistaken that he is not a jazz player.

However, it must also be remembered that Goh carries the flag of another fabled land, that of his homeland Japan. This is magnificently displayed in several tracks on the album. The most obvious are the two tracks of traditional Japanese folk music that have been beautifully arranged by Goh himself.

"Energy" is Goh Kurosawa's second recording as a solo artist; his first album being "Hitori" from 2007. The official release for "Energy" is January 19, 2013 with a tour of Japan and the US West Coast to follow. It is on the Onigawara Records label.

This album seizes the listener's heart from the opening strings. Entitled "Green is Her Favorite Color" the piece has all the delicacy and emotion and charismatic changes that one could imagine from a Japanese folk song but it is a delightfully original piece written by Goh himself. It is a song that keeps the listener returning for more of it.

The delicacy is built upon in the second track "My Family My Friends." Goh's punch and slap has become characteristic in his live playing but it is in fine energy on this album. The percussion is all Goh on this track as he provides the rhythmic slap and thump in this solo effort.

The haunting loveliness of the traditional Japanese folk song "Sakura" is heartbreakingly rendered by Goh and it is heartbreakingly short at only :54 in length. It is the one and only disappointment on the album that this was not given a 10 minute expansion. It would have betrayed the truth of the song, however, to make it any longer. The love of the Sakura (cherry blossom) is in large part because of its exquisite but too-rapid blossoming and passing. The song is just and appropriate.

Another Japanese folk favorite follows next entitled "Ano Subarashii Ai." Goh is supported by vocal master Mon David. It is lively and uplifting. Goh's lead vocals are surprisingly delightful. The backing vocals, whose parts were arranged by Mon and Goh, take on a hard rap that is reminiscent of Shadowfax's "Brown Rice."

Supporting Goh instrumentally on this track are Hugo Aguayo with the percussion of cajon, palmeros and "shouts" and JP Maramba on bass and "shouts."

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What should not be lost in the midst of all that, however, is the delicate delivery of Goh's guitar. Mon carries the rhythm guitar and does so splendidly. However, it is still Goh's flamenco guitar on the chorus lines that are so inspiring. Additionally, the verse section is in 5/4 time and is not traditional to Japanese music. If possible, listen again and again and focus on the flamenco guitar.

The light acoustic guitar follows after in a beautiful rendition of "Can't Help Falling in Love." The refined attention to the touching glissando and the striking chords are captivating. This was a delightfully emotional tribute—not to Elvis Presley, but to falling in love.

The astonishing succeeding track is another shocker; it is a staggering flamenco guitar version of Bob Marley's "No Woman No Cry." Goh's understanding of divergent musical forms is impressive. I have seen him perform live with speed and power and vicious attack. On "Energy", by contrast, he harnesses that with one exception.



However, it is the energy of the power and speed that has been disciplined into a delicate approach. "Energy" is not the absence or lack of power, it is the enlightenment of power.

Goh shows that and his interpretive understanding once again on the Charlie Haden piece "First Song." His approach to three completely different styles—Elvis to Marley to Haden—is a remarkable revelation of Goh's own spirit and intelligence.

Once again, he does it through the medium of the flamenco guitar and the results are heart-warming and soul-stirring.

Then come the most rewarding moments of the entire album in the form of an original suite composed by Goh, who also arranged all the tracks on the album. The suite is collectively called "Fruit Bunny" with the three segments respectively entitled "Bun Bun", "If I Could Only Find My Apple" and "Inochi/Energy."

"Fruit Bunny: Bun Bun" is a sweet acoustic foray into childhood. "If I Could Only Find My Apple Tail" is the one track where Goh's speed and power are on display and he shows it through the electric guitar. It is the only track to utilize that instrument and it is like listening to Deep Purple for the first time all over again. I was transported back to the first time I heard "Machine Head" and I was loving the feeling. At the 6:36 mark,

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though, a tenderness emerged that is surprising. Then the strength that had been evident in the first minutes was brought to a maturity with a moment of Brahms' "Lullaby" added. The musicians with Goh on this track actually are members of his band SHARP THREE with Kai Kurosawa on 24-string Beartrax Big Mama Bear (an instrument that he designed) and the exceptionally tasteful drummer, Chuck van Haecke.

The theme of the suite began to take shape—or at least my interpretation of the suite. It was about growing up and finding oneself. The innocence of "Bun Bun" was followed by the raw energy that grew to maturity in "If I Could Only Find My Apple Tail." But even at the end of that adolescent romp, there was a brief look back at childhood and innocence.

The third movement of the suite was "Inochi/Energy." The flamenco guitar painted a portrait of the person who has moved from the simplicity of childhood through the unbridled passion of youth and has now learned to harness all of that and has grown in "Inochi" which is also a synonym for life. Indeed, Goh has taken the listener on a life-journey to a place where life and energy have been refined.

The final track could have been the fourth movement of the previous suite as it fits so well with what has gone before. Entitled "Tiara" it is truly the crowning moment of the album. It is reflective and it is calming. It is a moment of rare beauty.

It was recorded at the fabulous recording studio called Estúdio Dragão in São Paulo, Brazil and the

song is dedicated to his friend there who introduced him to the studio. As it worked out, this was the first song recorded so the album project initiated in Brazil.

Only Goh Kurosawa could have done this album. It was recorded with no overdubs or loops. It is not only his talent that is brought to bear; it is his heart and it is his wisdom. It is his energy and life that have been revealed on this album of joy and gratitude.

