

## SAMON KAWAMURA

### - Unfold -

It 's a friendly summer 's day in June when I meet Samon Kawamura in his studio in one of these typical old buildings in Berlin Kreuzberg. Samon has nearly finished his work on **Unfold**, his second solo-album, and is just about 24 hours before his departure to Tokyo, where he will visit his family and promote the new longplayer. The final corrections on the cover artwork and the mastering still need to be done, which is why the situation still is a little hectic.

The studio itself radiates calmness and warmth, very well matching the organic and analogue sound of the music of its tenant. A former living room with a wooden floor, a stuccoed ceiling and an old tiled stove in the corner function as the control room. „The monitor-situation might be improvable“ admits Samon and grins. The record collection is quite appropriate for a HipHop-producer in his mid-30ies with an affinity for Jazz: Vinyl records from artists like Jurassic Five, People Under The Stairs and Pete Rock (with and without CL Smooth) share the crate. On the opposite side of the room, the CD-shelf is crowned with the „Complete Impulse Studio Recordings“-collection of the John Coltrane Quartet. The other „furnishings“ also form a coherent overall picture: In front of the windows with a view onto the neighboring park stand a Wurlitzer Electric Piano and a pair of Technics 1210 turntables. The little sneaker collection on the floor is mostly dominated by some Onitsuka Tiger models – which says 'Tokyo, not only Herzogenaurach.'

Within a short year **Unfold**, the successor of *Translations* (Samon 's debut-album released on Nesola in the middle of 2007), came into existence in this room. The most obvious difference in comparison with its predecessor is the participation of vocalists/rappers, whose selection nearly seems to follow a concept. With Madlib' s brother **OH NO** and **Aloe Blacc** two Stonethrow-artists stood in front of the mic. The contributions of **Om'Mas Keith** (SA-RA Creative Partners) and the producing MC **Ta'Raach** fit in the picture as well with regard to the creative backgrounds and interests, the whole thing being rounded out by **Kev Brown** from the Jazzy Jeff-camp and **Laura López Castro**.

„With *Translations* I made a clear decision for an instrumental album. When my label asked me whether I would feel guests on the beats, I already had let loose. For me the album was coherent instrumental-only.“ Thus *Translations* was released as a record without any interpretations given by lyrics. In fact the prevailing relaxed atmospherical mood with transcendent and meditative elements invited the listener to shoot his own movie for the music in mind.

With **Unfold** there nearly is a balance between songs with and without vocals. The message being articulated by the lyrical contributions to the songs is basically characterized by passion for the art form and some kind of authentic and serious contemplation on the subject matter. Of course there also is some typical HipHop-braggadocio, e.g. when OH NO states „The world is yours? I might need the universe. I control the sun. I can make the fire burst.“ on the warm vibing Lootpack-like instrumental of **Right Here**. But the main concern is the love for the art form and the defense of the own interpretation: „Right now – they don 't wanna rap tight, so I might go hard left, until niggers act right.“ as well as in the chorus: „This is why I do what I do when I do what I did ... I love this shit.“ Representative for the attitude and independence of all contributors may as well be some lines in Aloe Blaccs lyrics on **Try**, a song resulting from two days off in Berlin during a tour: „I was tryin' new things, sort of tryin' to sing. Some people was like 'What the hell is you doin'?' Look at him, ah he just tryin' to be different. But I wasn 't tryin'. I am - look at my pigment. And look where I grew up at and look where I been. No – don 't ever try to tell me, that I 'm tryin' again. I 'm just doin' it. Just bein' me.“

„I can 't make a fat beat at 9 o' clock in the morning. I am a night person.“ explains Samon in answering the question about his daily routine as a producer. Therefore mornings usually are dedicated to administrative and technical tasks: „During the last few years I encoded much of my record collection and built up sample-libraries in the morning for example. I love to have quick access to all my sounds and to be able to immediately start with the implementation of an idea. In this respect I 'm not a classical record store-digger anymore.“ So instrumentals come alive in the afternoon at the earliest, but mostly at night time. Sometimes also in unusual places: „The beat for OH NO I created in a public swimming pool, when I accompanied my daughter to her diving lessons. I wanted to set up Logic on my laptop again, which is why I had the computer with me. At the end I experimented around with some samples and

when I was back at home, I had the loop playing in the background while I was cooking. After a while I thought 'This is not so bad.'"

Samon still likes to set a course with sampled statements in the Pete Rock-like Interludes, which have been characteristic for Translations already: „Among other things this time it is about HipHop being such a great kind of music, because it leads you to so many other kinds and genres of music. From this perspective, HipHop is just an access for other things. It is a door through which you might reach the most different rooms. That is what makes this art form special and what causes an infinite enthusiasm with me.“

Of course this open-minded approach for things beyond the usual 4/4-meter is nourished by Samons biography outside the music-scene. Born as the child of a Japanese graphic-designer and a female German goldsmith in Heidelberg (Germany) in 1973, Samon moves to Tokyo with his family only one year later, where he will attend the German school and will be equally exposed to Japanese, German and American influences.

When he sells his car in Tokyo in 1994 in order to buy a sampler and moves to Cologne (Germany), he has already made a few musical experiences. After he began to play the drums at the age of eleven, he acquired a pair of turntables and groups like Public Enemy and the Native Tongue Movement in the shape of A Tribe Called Quest and De La Soul as well as bands like Gangstarr had a major impact on his musical understanding beginning in the late 80ies.

Without the slightest clue of the German music-scene, he meets one of the musicians of the crossover band „be“ in the mid-90ies in Berlin, a band being in starting-blocks with their debut-album *bold* on EMI. The guys invite Samon to Hanover (Germany) in order to rehearse with the band as a DJ and to subsequently play a gig. „At first I thought this was a little hobby band of some friends who just finished school, but soon I realized, there was a little more behind it. Afterwards we have been on tour endlessly, it was like a never ending school trip. I mostly got to know the live-sector and the mechanism of promotion and distribution back then.“ For the 1999 released be-album *orange* Samon already produced a couple of songs.

Subsequently he decides to leave Cologne in favor of Berlin. Here he lives and works to this day: „People come here from almost every country and culture and for every reason possible. You can deal with them, but you don't need to. There are no necessities to take part in everything, but there neither is a feeling of being excluded. Apart from that, the quality of life is high. I need the feeling of being with me and myself in order to make music. In Berlin I experience this very strongly.“

In the year 2000 it comes to a collaboration with the Jazz trumpeter Till Brönner. After having accompanied the horn-player live as a DJ, Brönner and Samon produced Brönner's album *Blue Eyed Soul* together. That way some Premo-like vocal scratches came to enrich songs like *No Fusion Generation* based on some dry drum-programming by Samon.

With regard to the future, Soman also thinks about working for the radio: „I find radio increasingly interesting and there is definitely much music I would like to make better known in Germany.“ Concerning his private taste, he starts to wax lyrical when he mentions Flying Lotus: „For me this guy is HipHop 3.0, just really advanced. You hear the HipHop, but you hear the electro thing as well. Also there is a strong deepness and something warm and soulful.“

„Basically I more and more like people with an electronic approach, who nevertheless have an analogue feeling in their music.“ states Samon and indicates the direction his own music might choose in the future.

Until then the status quo concerning Samon will be found on ***Unfold***.