

KOKI NAKANO  
OCEANIC FEELING



**Japanese composer and pianist Koki Nakano releases Oceanic Feeling, an album which vigorously explores life's fine-lines.**

Koki Nakano's new album, **Oceanic Feeling**, is a celebration of ambiguity. The album's title is borrowed from an expression coined by the French writer and musician Romain Rolland in 1927. In a letter written to Sigmund Freud, Rolland described the oceanic feeling as *"the sensation of eternity, a feeling of being one with the external world as a whole"*. While this concept of oneness permeates Nakano's whole album, the music also deals with his inability to fully live in this so-called oceanic feeling, capturing thus the composer's longing, frustration and ultimately search for harmony within his own limitations.

For Nakano, who has played the piano since he was three-years old, music has always been his way of finding balance in the world. And it's this very physical experience of music – one which acknowledges the bodily tensions of movement and gravity – that makes his sound so unique. It also

### Album Tracklist:

1. Oceanic Feeling
2. Mue
3. Glances
4. External Cephalic Version
5. Irié
6. Mirroring
7. Hydrocode
8. Port De Bras
9. Treg
10. Birth Canal
11. Body Scan

explains why dance is such a big part of his work. In 2019, Nakano collaborated with renowned visual artist **Kohei Nawa**, famous choreographer **Damien Jalet** and a group of dancers to explore different points of fusion between the human body and the landscape. The project was then followed by Nakano's second album, **Pre-choreographed**, where he continued his collaboration with dancers to further explore this universe, *"There's no sound without movement, there's no movement without sound. The two are inseparable,"* says Nakano, who composed much of **Oceanic Feeling** while watching dancers move to what he played in the Parisian artist residence he inhabited. *"Sometimes the dancers would tell me I was going too fast and that they couldn't move their bodies like that, and so I would adapt the music. I don't want the music to become disconnected from the human body,"* says Nakano.

The human body is such a strong conceptual source of inspiration for Nakano, that many tracks on Oceanic Feel are named after corporal processes. There's **Eternal Cephalic Version**, a



procedure used to turn a fetus to a head-down position before labour begins, **Tregs**, a type of T cells that act to suppress immune response, and **Port de Bras**, the name given to an elegant movement of the arms in ballet. For the latter piece, Nakano imagined the gesture being performed underwater, *“with each arm affecting the surrounding and leaving visible traces”*. The music paints the picture vividly, with the gentle piano melody echoed and in the space around it. Instead of visible traces, each key leaves “sound traces” – tiny reverberations that are accentuated in the piece through effects.

Musically speaking, Nakano is constantly moving through the grey area between intellect and instinct on **Oceanic Feeling**. Tracks oftentimes feel simple, and in that simplicity, genuinely touching. They’re never so abstract that they wouldn’t be able to instigate body movements. Yet behind every piano key is a complex, layered recording system developed by the artist himself that gives sounds a unique depth and, as Nakano describes, *“a sensation of being able to dive into the piano”*. Nakano also leverages on ambiguity when it comes to style; on the one hand he creates detailed and immersive soundscapes that approximates his work to that of ambient composers, yet in stark contrast to those, he doesn’t ever shun melodies. **Oceanic Feeling’s** title track is a contemplative piece that encompasses subtle electronic textures, minimal piano and fleshed out melodies in one harmonious universe. The piece is a tribute to the magical moment of oneness experienced by mother and fetus during pregnancy, *“I think it’s the only real time we get to be in this middle space I’m looking for, where we are one being, but also connected to someone else. I like to think about the inborn memory we carry from that period,”* says Nakano.

Undoubtedly, but not explicitly, Nakano’s roots in Japan play a role in **Oceanic Feelings**. Different from the western tradition of thinking, based on isolation of facts and specialization of knowledge, Nakano brings a more holistic understanding to the table. Through his music, he wants to show that seemingly separate concepts – body and surroundings, music and dance – can be perceived and felt as one. Nonetheless, Nakano acknowledges that this sentiment is far from natural in day-to-day life; from the moment we are born, we feel torn, tumultuously shifting from a desire for unity and a need to retreat to our inner world. Perhaps no other track on Oceanic Feeling captures this divided nature better than **Body Scan**, the album’s closing track. *“For this piece, I wanted to create a character who is an epicurean rooted in deep despair,”* says Nakano. The piece moves from the seductive call of a gentle, repetitive piano motif progressively towards an inebriated state where voice and bird recordings, electronic hums and hisses collide in chaotic uproar. *“I attempted to express a state of mind that holds at the same time, both a longing for, and conflict with the world. For a long time I have carried this struggle in me, of being one and defined by many boundaries but also able to reach infinity through my imagination,”* says the composer. Nakano’s attempt to weave such dissonant sentiments in one narrative makes **Body Scan**, as well as **Oceanic Feeling** on the whole, an impressive avant-garde journey that moves and stirs without ever losing balance, *“Recently, I started recognizing that I will probably keep this struggle in me my whole life. I will always be standing in the shaky space right in the middle of the seesaw, trying to find balance.”*

