

Elina Duni Quartet: Matane Malit (2012)

By

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Published: October 28, 2012

There was a time when jazz musicians were commonly recruited to play on pop records, because their purview was so broad that they could mold themselves into any context. Elina Duni's music may not be jazz by conventional definition, but its improvisational spirit clearly occupies the broader "jazz state of mind" to which the Albanian-born/raised and now Swiss-resident singer refers to in the press sheet to *Matanë Malit*, her third release as a leader, and first for ECM.

Her choice of quartet mates also connects her music to the greater jazz continuum. Pianist [Colin Vallon](#) and drummer [Norbert Pfammatter](#) have been with Duni since her 2008 debut, *Baresha* (Meta), while bassist [Patrice Moret](#)-also a member of Vallon's trio, which released its own ECM debut, *Rruga*, in 2011-is the quartet's newest member. Duni's material is substantially different from Vallon's, however, with much of *Matanë Malit* sourced from traditional music of the singer's homeland and its diaspora; but the pianist demonstrates similarly profound patience here, allowing the music to unfold with unerring inevitability, and an uncanny ability to mine even the simplest of structures to reveal them for the gems they truly are.

ECM has long demonstrated a particular talent in finding singers who impress through subtlety and nuance rather than melisma, most recently Morocco's [Amina Alaoui](#), whose *Arco Iris* (2011) similarly referenced its singer's cultural origins, but differed in its predilection for stringed instruments. Duni's use of piano trio as musical context may be more familiar, but Vallon, Moret and Pfammatter approach these twelve songs with similar understatement and freedom. Duni is clearly capable of power and range-revealed early in the set, towards the end of the opening "Ka një mot"-but the singer's delivery is never less than completely connected to the heart of her songs; a surrender to the music rather than the ego that's mirrored by her group. And yet, it's that very selflessness that makes *Matanë Malit* so thoroughly memorable.

The music may sound and feel effortless, yet there are layers of complexity hidden within that make it a revelation each and every time. As gentle as the emergent pulse of "Ka një mot" is, its irregular meter is further toyed with by the trio when a series of majestic chords emerge, giving the impression of conventional waltz time but, with an added bar of two beats at the end of every fourth, clearly not.

Still, Duni and her quartet manage to imbue this haunting, plaintive music-detailed though it may be-with a spontaneity that renders *Matanë Malit* such an evocative experience. The album's sequencing seems to open the music up just a tad more with each song, as Duni's own approach combines phrasing and articulation clearly rooted in her native country's indigenous music, but with devices like her heavy, rhythmic breathing towards the end of "Valzë e valëve" revealing a more modern and cosmopolitan mind at work.

An album that grabs hold of the head and heart so insidiously that it's almost impossible to let it go, *Matanë Malit* will hopefully introduce Duni and her superb group to the broader international audience they so richly deserve.

Track Listing: Ka një mot; Kjani trima; Kur të kujtosh; Valzë e valëve; Unë ty moj; Erë pranverore; Çelo Mezani; Ra kambana; Çobankat; Kristal; U rrit vasha; Mine Peza.

Personnel: Elina Duni: voice; Colin Vallon: piano; Patrice Moret: double bass; Norbert Pfammatter: drums.

Record Label: [ECM Records](#)