

New Issues

Vocalist Elina Duni is an expatriate of Albania and makes Switzerland her home. Like Karparov, she also hails from the Berlin Hochschule für Musik. Her maiden voyage recording shows another way to combine Euro-Folk and the Modern Jazz aesthetic.

The opposite of the rather peppy album before, this music is often akin to a kind of Bill Evans Trio sort of sound at its most impressionistic paired with a singing angel. Take "Lule," a traditional Albanian song. A very brooding, quiet piano intro sets the scene. Elina comes in with a pretty, intimate rendering of the tune, ballad style. The free drums behind pianist Vallon's poised restatement of the theme make for memorable listening. Then she's back, right on pitch and phrasing beautifully.

The traditional Greek "Yiati Den M'agapas" is the first of a number of up excursions and she does the melody like she were scatting, an approach she uses fairly often throughout the disk-to good effect. There is plenty of verve and an impeccably precise and driven articulation of the grace-noted minor melody. Then Vallon's piano gets a turn at some improv around it while the toms pound out a tattoo and Oester's bass pivots on the minor center, the whole thing evoking a post-Jarrett sound.

Another good example of the music is "Kiparissin" a further excursion on traditional Albanian themes. After a Free intro Elina comes in with a beautiful articulation of the tune which contrasts nicely with interludes for prepared-dampened piano and drums with open snare. The trio is quite Free though pulsating in their interludes and she does some tasteful Free sound sculpting too.

Her voice is a true instrument, with the sort of true musicality that is rare with singers. I could go on and on with more highlights but won't suffice to say that Elina and her group mesmerize with a unique amalgam of Eastern European tradition transposed to a modern Jazz key, a group sensibility that goes far beyond singer and typical piano trio backup. The music is tender, quietly sad, meditatively intimate and passionate in turn and Elina is a vocal stylist that deserves to be heard. This is lovely music, lovingly rendered. She shows that the singer and band formula need not rely on stale, endless reiterations of the past but can strike out on new roads that synthesize different styles and world sounds. Excellent.

Grego Applegate Edwards, Cadence April-May-June 2009