

Critical Jazz

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Elina Duni Quartet Matane Malit ECM 2012

Not since the June 2011 release of Amina Alaoui's Arco Iris has ECM released an such an exquisite vocal performance as they have with the Elina Duni Quartet's Matane Malit.

In keeping with the spectacular and often highly evocative cover art the translation of Matane Malit which is essentially "Beyond the Mountain) is a personal homage to Albania and Duni's riff on her improvisational process as applied to the vocal exploratory given Balkan folk songs. I use the term "riff" as the creative process here involves a somewhat ambient feel and application of the form and functionality of the song structure and the implication and meaning of the words or to quote Duni, "servicing the song...reclaiming and reinventing it."

A pristine voice, quiet and unassuming yet with the ability to play catch and release on a note and set the words free as an atmospheric and deceptively subtle organic chamber sound fills the void with deep rich colors. The material covered here are songs of indescribable beauty and strength that are older songs from her native Albania and it's regions troubled history. Collin Vallon on piano is simply a stroke of musical genius and rounding out the more percussive oriented rhythm section we find Patrice Moret on double-bass and Norbert Pfammatter on drums. Duni left Albania in 1992 and after attempts into more classical music as well as blues and jazz standards, her vocal artistry began taking shape and growing wings with a gentle spirit but powerful expression.

Influenced by the more western approach to improvised music, Duni's stellar quartet shines a laser beam on this most powerful of lyrical poetry. Matane Malit is more than a quartet but a unified musical voice understanding the most basic of concepts of never feeling the need to play a tune the same way twice as the embrace the mindset of all improvised music as a state mind. Cerebral bliss with an organic heartbeat. Vallon serves as the perfect sonic counterpoint while bassist Moret embraces the more zen like less is more approach and the unassuming nuances provided by Pfammatter fit like the missing pieces to some beautiful musical painting.

Quiet possibly Manfred Eicher's finest work as producer on any ECM project to date. More than a "release" this would have to be classified as an almost spiritual experience of the ECM kind. Haunting melodies that linger in ones heart and soul while transcending both musical and cultural boundaries with a simple grace and elegance rarely heard.