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by John Fordham**

Elina Duni Quartet – review

Matane Malit (ECM)

When Albanian singer Elina Duni was studying classical music and [jazz](#) in Switzerland, she didn't know any folk songs from her homeland – but after 2004, they became her central inspiration. Duni sings in Albanian, but though these Balkan melodies are reclaimed with scrupulous care, her technique runs from flawlessly pitched, hymnlike incantations to swerving wordless improv in the style of Norma Winstone or Sidsel Endresen, while her partnership with Swiss pianist Colin Vallon's trio enhances the discreet subtleties of her jazz sensibility. An early track such as the solemnly pulsing Kjani trima is traditional, but Duni shifts from a melodious suppleness to skimming improvisation in the more emphatic Kur te kujtosh, and becomes turbulently emotional over Vallon's sinister banging chords after the tranquil beginnings of Vajze e Valeve. The singer's taut timing and rhythmic inventiveness develop the damped-strings groove of Ere Pranverore, while Ra Kambana suggests more declamatory, African-inflected singing and the blues, and Cobankat sounds like a slow country and western song. This quartet definitely sounds like rising star material for ECM.