

# The Guardian

## Music

### Jazz album of the month

## Review

# Elina Duni: A Time to Remember review – a unique voice in jazz

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(ECM)

Albanian-born Elina Duni sounds intensely like herself while drawing on a variety of influences, as her impeccable trio back her with diamond-bright sounds



**John Fordham**

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**I**t's sometimes said that jazz vocals are supposed to

sound like the singer, not the song. Departed legends from Billie Holiday and Ella Fitzgerald to Mark Murphy and Betty Carter have epitomised that, as idiosyncratic muses

such as Cécile McLorin Salvant and Gretchen Parlato continue to do today. But few contemporary jazz-influenced singers manage to sound so intensely like themselves while drawing on such a variety of genres, languages, and cultural backstories as the Albania-born vocalist Elina Duni.

A Time to Remember is Duni's ninth album and second with the UK's Rob Luft (guitar), Fred Thomas (piano/percussion), and Switzerland's Matthieu Michel (flugelhorn) – a trio impeccably attuned to her ability to convey intensity with the most delicate yet diamond-bright sounds, cannily improvising in ways that stretch the songs without disrupting Duni's surefooted control over their shape. In its mix of Duni/Luft originals with European, American, Kosovan and Albanian traditional songs, A Time to Remember complements the same band's cinematic 2020 ECM album Lost Ships. But Duni's and Luft's travels have since taken them on expeditions to the Sinai Desert and the Red Sea, and a sense of appreciative awe touches much of this music, particularly the pair's daydreaming, note-gliding title track and the wordlessly rapturous, cymbal-shimmering Dawn.

Duni's excited gasps on the turns of the skipping Albanian traditional E Vogël (Little One) evoke a child's impetuosity, while the beautiful Charlie Haden ballad First Song opens on Luft's echoing Bill Frisell-like effects, and unfolds in Duni's softly yearning delivery of the Abbey Lincoln lyrics. Send in the Clowns, a much-covered tough call for any singer, similarly manifests this fine vocalist's remarkable capacity for expressing strength and resolve by the most reticent of means.