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## Elina Duni / Rob Luft 'Reaching for the Moon' CD (ECM) 5/5



On *Reaching for the Moon*, Elina Duni and Rob Luft strip their collaboration down to its most essential form: voice and guitar. After the textured, ensemble-driven landscapes of their earlier quartet recordings, this third outing together feels intimate, nocturnal, and quietly daring. Put simply, this is a listening experience of sublime beauty.

Duni, born in Albania and raised in Switzerland, has built a career on dissolving musical borders. Her work often draws on Balkan folk traditions while embracing jazz, chanson, and beyond, and here she leans fully into that multilingual, cross-cultural identity. The programme is striking in its breadth: from Irving Berlin's classic title track to Ornette Coleman's "Lonely Woman," via Gabriel Faure, Pino Daniele, and traditional songs from Kosovo. Yet rather than feeling eclectic for its own sake, the album unfolds with a quiet internal logic, guided by mood, atmosphere, and a recurring sense of moonlit reflection.

Duni's voice is, quite simply, spellbinding. She has an extraordinary ability to inhabit each song fully, shifting between languages and styles without ever losing her core identity. On "Reaching for the Moon," she delivers the melody with a fragile, almost whispered intimacy, while "Les Berceaux" carries a poised, classical clarity. Elsewhere, in pieces like "Ani More Nuse" and "Leili Lullaby," her voice becomes more percussive and elemental, enhanced by subtle hand drum textures that deepen the sense of ritual and tradition.

Alongside her, Rob Luft once again shows his versatility to stunning effect. Still early in what is already an acclaimed career – having emerged from London's vibrant jazz scene and earned accolades such as the UK Parliamentary Jazz Awards – Luft proves himself a master of restraint. His playing here is less about virtuosity and more about colour and sensitivity. He shifts effortlessly between idioms, from folk-inflected fingerpicking to ambient washes and delicate harmonic shading, always serving the emotional core of the music. The interplay between the two is where the album truly comes alive. Luft's guitar breathes with a sense of natural belonging alongside Duni's phrasing, anticipating and responding in real time. Their originals—"Foolish Flame," "Magnolia," and "Your Arms" – sit seamlessly alongside the covers, blending jazz, folk, and chanson into something deeply personal. Even the medley of film themes by Shigeru Umebayashi and Krzysztof Komeda becomes a wordless meditation, with Duni's voice floating like another instrument.

If there is a defining quality to *Reaching for the Moon*, it is its atmosphere. Produced by Manfred Eicher, the album carries the hallmark spaciousness associated with ECM: every note feels placed with care, every silence meaningful. The result is music that feels suspended in time – hushed, luminous, and deeply affecting. Ultimately, Duni and Luft combine perfectly here, casting a magical spell for this listener.