

The Best of 2022 - Another New Sound of Surprise

Late in the year, as the latest in a cycle of Indian Summers beckoned, confusing the flora and fauna and those of us assigned to nourish them, thanks to the good auspices of the irreplaceable Dave Douglas, I came upon *Jump*, the debut recording of the Argentinian saxophonist Julieta Eugenio. Julieta recorded it for Greenleaf Music, the musician-friendly record label that Dave shepherds. That connection was enough to get my attention, but it didn't take thirty seconds listening to "Efes," the opening track, to draw me in. Backed by Matt Dwonszyk on bass and Jonathan Barber on drums, Julieta essays eight original and two standards in what has become my latest favorite example of an endlessly intriguing jazz subgenre: the saxophone trio, a horn with bass and drums and no chordal anchor.

I doubt I'm alone in saying that my introduction to the format was Sonny Rollins's *A Night at the Vanguard*, recorded in 1958. Talk about setting a high bar! And since then, the concept has been explored and expanded by some of the most accomplished musicians in jazz: Lee Konitz (*Motion*), Ornette Coleman (*At the Golden Circle*), Sam Rivers (*The Quest*), the entire catalog of Henry Threadgill's Air, Joe Henderson's *State of the Tenor*, Mark Turner (*Fly*), JD Allen (*Shine, Barracoon.*, and *Americana*, [but, interestingly, not *Americana, Vol. 2*, out this year, which adds the guitarist Charlie Hunter, to excellent effect]), and Melissa Aldana (*Crash Trio*). That's just a partial list, from what's top of mind today. You probably have your own favorites.

In the many times I've listened to *Jump* in the last month, (I think) I've heard quotes from, references to, or hints of saxophonists across the whole history of the music, from Coleman Hawkins through Wayne Shorter and Joe Henderson to Chris Potter and Joshua Redman. All that, and more, in a performance of sustained brilliance that is entirely Julieta's own, whether she's trading rhythmic conceits with Jonathan or playing hide-and-go-seek with the harmonies Matt suggests.

The great jazz writer Whitney Balliett made a strong case for listening to new artists perform standards, so you can concentrate on isolating the ideas that are new against a familiar melodic and harmonic structure, without at the same time having to absorb the structure and intricacies of a new composition. That maxim drew me to pay special attention to Julieta's innovations on "Crazy He Calls Me." We do an exercise of this kind every week on Jazz Spectrum during the two sets dedicated to Song of the Week. But in this instance, how about you listen to Billie Holiday and Dinah Washington sing it, and Wynton Kelly and Lee Konitz play it, and then spend some time with Julieta as she puts it through her own prism. I'm sure I've not absorbed anywhere near everything she has in mind, but that was more than enough to convince me she belongs, not just on this list, but on Dave Douglas's label, and anywhere she wants to play.

I've decided not to dwell on how many women are represented in this year's Best of Year selections, nor on the vast age-range and United Nations qualities of the list. I am happy to begin to think that these things no longer warrant remarking, that jazz is in

the newest age of its constant evolution, and that the music is ever more becoming what it has been for the century+ of its life: a vast open space marked by a welcoming freedom that cares only if you have something important to express and a engaging way of expressing it.

In the list below, you'll find my selections for the 24 releases from 2022 that most met that ideal.

(* denotes a special favorite.)

Melissa Aldana, 12 Stars -
JD Allen - Americana Vol. 2
* Avishai Cohen, Shifting Sands
Roxy Coss, Disparate Parts
* Andrew Cyrille, 2 Blues for Cecil
* Julieta Eugenio, Jump
Avram Fefer Quartet, Juba Lee
Manel Fortia, Despertar
* Mary Halvorson, Amaryllis
Tigrin Hamasyan, StandArt
* Fred Hersch, Breath by Breath
Charles Lloyd, Trios: Sacred Thread
* David Murray Brave New World Trio, Seriana Promethea
Elsa Nilsson, Atlas of Sound
Joshua Redman, Long Gone
* Marta Sanchez, SAAM
Linda Sikhakhane, Isambulo
Wadada Leo Smith, The Emerald Duets
Tyshawn Sorey, Mesmerism
* Tyshawn Sorey, The Off-Off Broadway Guide to Synchronism
Thumbscrew, Multicolored Midnight
Oded Tzur, Isabela
Immanuel Wilkins, The 7th Hand
Miguel Zenon - Musica de las Americas