



Big & Lovely
Allison Miller (with the One O'Clock Lab Band)
(Royal Potato Family)
by Andrew Schinder

Over the past several decades, veteran drummer-composer Allison Miller has established herself as one of the pre-eminent modern jazz percussionists. With her band Boom Tic Boom, Miller and her collaborators have explored and advanced modern rhythms and sounds, releasing a series of acclaimed compositions that dabble in the adventurous while keeping one foot solely in post-bop traditions. Miller is also one of the core members of the supergroup Artemis, in which she has teamed up with such luminaries as Renee Rosnes and Ingrid Jensen.

In 2022, Miller traveled to the University of North Texas to collaborate with the One O'Clock Lab Band (under the direction of Alan Baylock), a renowned, student outfit that has amassed numerous accolades over the years, including seven GRAMMY nominations. That partnership has ultimately resulted in the album *Big & Lovely*, where Miller and the Lab Band repurposed eight existing Miller compositions as big band arrangements. She has stated that a dream of hers was to create big band versions of her previous compositions, and here Miller has certainly accomplished that. *Big & Lovely* doesn't break any new ground or explore any new avenues like her prior ventures, but the eight tracks offer proficient, energetic, straight-ahead jazz, as the drummer's spirited, tight percussion provides a rhythmic canvas for the students to showcase their skills.

The swinging album opener sets the tone with the Lab Band's brass section's blistering energy. Joshua Zeitlin (trumpet), Carly Stock (alto) and Anthony Bolden (tenor) trade solos like seasoned pros, and the result is somewhat reminiscent of the opening number of a golden age Broadway show. Several selections were originally featured on Miller's acclaimed 2023 album and multimedia showcase, *Rivers in Our Veins*, such as "Potomac" (based on one of the rivers that inspired the collection), which remains a bluesier and moodier affair than many of the more up-tempo tracks on the current album. It's a beautiful arrangement, with soloists Ken Ebo (trombone), Craig Schroeder (trumpet, flugelhorn) and Gabriel Nieves (tenor) imbuing the composition with emotion and passion. "Fierce", arranged by Miller's Artemis collaborator, bassist Noriko Ueda, is a mid-tempo showpiece that, not to be outdone by the youngsters, allows Miller to cut loose on percussion, showing the students how it's done.

For more info visit royalpotatofamily.com. Miller is at Village Vanguard Mar. 4-9 (with Artemis). See Calendar.



Beneath the Skin
Nnenna Freelon (Origin)
by Jim Motavalli

Singer Nnenna Freelon has long shown she knows

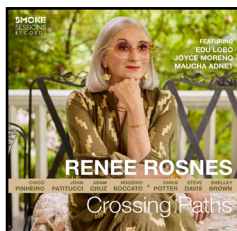
her way around the Great American Songbook (she's recorded tributes to Billie Holiday and Stevie Wonder), but on her newly released 12th album, *Beneath the Skin*, the tunes, many of them poignant ballads, are all hers, with several celebrating women in many colors.

On this straight-ahead acoustic affair—with an unusual instrumentation of cello, trombone and guitar plus piano trio—Freelon proves herself an astute songwriter with several of her songs entwining women's thoughts and feelings utilizing imagery from the natural world. "Widow Song" is a knockout: a new twist on carrying a dimming torch. She asks, "Must I wear this cloak of gray/And give myself to yesterday?" It's a song that would work in many contexts, and pianist Alan Pasqua and guitarist Keith Ganz work wonders here. Bassist Jonathan Richards and drummer Steve Hass are also major contributors throughout, adapting superbly to Freelon's curve balls.

"Black Iris" (co-written with Pasqua) starts out with echoes of "Afro Blue", but soon it goes in a different direction—celebrating an outstanding woman whose "petals are on display." Evan Roberson's trombone is valuable here, riffing under the pianist's solo and taking the tune out. "Here's Your Hat" is a straightforward kiss-off: "I can't miss you until you're gone." The trombonist has a nice, lengthy, wry solo. "Dark and Lovely" is pure swing, descended from the Gershwins' "Lady Be Good", and Roberson gets a featured romp. The title tune showcases the singer backed by Ganz, who offers a multi-layered guitar solo. It's another song destined to remain in the memory, with its wonderful writing: "The forest testifies in shades of green/A mossy hymn that plays softly by a stream." "Last Dream Home" (written with Andrew Bernison) is like a modern-day *Brief Encounter* (the 1945 British film), with its sad, long goodbye in a train station. It also has another fine Ganz solo. And then there's the album's cover of Stephen Foster's 1847 "Oh! Susanna", a minstrel song that was his first "hit." Freelon slows the tune way down, making it atmospheric, somewhat sorrowful; it's also interesting that the song was originally written from an African American perspective (a fact that has unfortunately disappeared with time from the most commonly performed versions).

Ultimately, *Beneath the Skin* is a very accomplished demonstration of veteran singer Nnenna Freelon's numerous, remarkable talents.

For more info visit originarts.com. The album release concert is at Dizzy's Club Mar. 21-23. See Calendar.



Crossing Paths
Renee Rosnes (Smoke Sessions)
Arboresque
Artemis (Blue Note)
by Ken Dryden

Renee Rosnes has been a major part of the jazz scene since the late '80s. Well-known as a pianist and composer, she also has immense gifts as an arranger.

The 2024 studio sessions found on *Crossing Paths* showcases her love of Brazilian music, which she has performed and occasionally recorded, but never made the centric theme of one of her albums. Her scores focus more on featuring ensembles and vocalists versus instrumental solos, but the interaction between the players is what gives this recording its depth and timelessness. With personnel that varies from track to track, spotlighted artists

include Shelly Brown (flute), Steve Davis (trombone), Chris Potter (tenor, soprano), Chico Pinheiro (guitar), John Patitucci (bass), Adam Cruz (drums) and Rogério Boccato (percussion). The performances convey the leader's understanding of the music's nuances, making it seem like Rosnes has been playing it for decades. Egberto Gismonti's frenetic "Frevo" serves as a breezy album opener, with its rapid-fire theme negotiated with finesse by Brown. Edu Lobo's heartfelt ballad "Pra Dizer Adeus" and the lively samba "Casa Forte" each feature vocals by their composer, and both are beautifully scored by the leader. Rosnes also explores the music of Antonio Carlos Jobim, including his less frequently heard "Canta, Canta Mais" as well as his popular "Caminhos Cruzados", both beautifully sung by Maucha Adnet. Vocalist Joyce Moreno is featured in her touching composition "Essa Mulher", with Davis' trombone adding a suitably weary backing.

In 2016, Rosnes was asked to form an all-female band to do a European tour, which resulted in the critically acclaimed collective Artemis. Rosnes also serves as music director for the band, now a quintet, with Ingrid Jensen (trumpet), Nicole Glover (tenor), Noriko Ueda (bass) and Allison Miller (drums). On the group's new *Arboresque*, the pianist's brilliant arrangement of fellow pianist Donald Brown's exotic "The Smile of the Snake" puts Artemis' intuitive chemistry in the forefront, with inventive and to-the-point solos, and tight interplay. Ueda contributed the upbeat post-bop vehicle "Komorebi", highlighted by the magical blend of trumpet and tenor in the introduction, leading into thoughtful, contrasting solos by Glover, Rosnes, then Jensen. The saxophonist's "Sights Unseen" is a whirlwind work that constantly shifts its focus with the leader

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- Sylvie Courvoisier/Mary Halvorson — *Bone Bells* (Pyroclastic)
- Satoko Fujii GEN — *Altitude 1100 Meters* (Libra)
- Ella Fitzgerald — *The Moment of Truth: Ella at The Coliseum* (Verve)
- Alexandra Grimal/Giovanni Di Domenico — *Shakkei* (Relative Pitch)
- Muriel Grossmann — *The Light of the Mind* (Dreamland)
- Nancy Harrow — *Second Thoughts* (Benfan Music)
- Nanami Haruta — *The Vibe* (Origin)
- Jessica Jones Quartet — *Edible Flowers* (Reva)
- Joëlle Léandre, Lotte Anker, Kresten Osgood Trio — *Worlds* (Fundacja Sluchaj)
- Mafalda Minnozzi — *Riofonica* (MPI)
- Sarah Belle Reid/Vinny Golia — *Accidental Ornithology* (Infrequent Seams)
- Tomeka Reid, Isidora Edwards, Elisabeth Coudoux — *Reid/Edwards/Coudoux* (Relative Pitch)
- Brandon Lopez/DoYeon Kim — *Syzygy, Vol. 1* (577 Records)
- Leslie Pintchik — *Prayer for What Remains* (Pintch Hard)
- Emily Remler — *Cookin' at the Queens* (Resonance)
- Maria Schneider Orchestra — *Decades* (ArtistShare)
- Melanie Scholtz — *Sweet Nancy (s/r)*