



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 “Frevô” 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

RECOMMENDED NEW RELEASES

- Sophie Agnel/John Butcher—**RARE** (Les Disques VICTO)
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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—*Riofonic* (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—*Szyzygy, 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)

switching to Fender Rhodes. Wayne Shorter’s classic “Footprints” has long been a jazz standard; Rosnes’ arrangement breaks fresh ground with its low-key introduction by the rhythm section, which then literally explodes into a fiery performance, with stellar trades between Jensen and the pianist. Miller’s engaging “Little Cranberry” is a breezy affair with its strong rhythmic pulse and lush harmonies. When they have time to get together to record or tour, Artemis is one of the supergroups of jazz active today.

For more info visit smokesessionsrecords.com and bluenote.com. Artemis’ album release concert is at *Village Vanguard* Mar. 4-9. See Calendar.



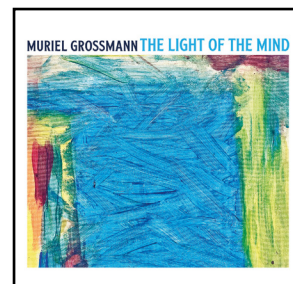
To Whom I Love
Summer Camargo (Blue Engine)
by Anna Steegmann

To Whom I Love is the remarkable debut album (after four years in the making) by the talented trumpeter and composer Summer Camargo, recorded when she was just 21. Hailing from Florida and now based in New York City, she has swiftly garnered numerous accolades, shared the stage with some of the best in the jazz world, become the youngest member of the Saturday Night Live Band and plays regularly with the Mingus Big Band and Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra. Released by Blue Engine (Jazz at Lincoln Center’s in-house label) and produced by trumpeter Sean Jones with Wynton Marsalis as executive producer, *To Whom I Love* is irrefutable proof of Camargo’s mastery of both trumpet and flugelhorn. Seven of the nine tracks are originals and showcase her unparalleled technical brilliance, luscious tone, lyrical phrasing and emotional depth, reminiscent of a much more seasoned trumpeter. She wrote each song for an influential person in her life, and her chosen bandmembers are equally impressive: Veronica Leahy (reeds), Jeffery Miller (trombone), Esteban Castro (piano), Raul Reyes Bueno (bass), Varun Das (drums) and Jamey Haddad (percussion). In addition, Joey DeFrancesco, the legendary organist, makes an appearance on two selections, marking his final recording before his passing in August 2022.

The upbeat and buoyant “JP Shuffle” immediately captivates. Listeners are taken on a joyous journey. Camargo leads the gorgeous melody, and shines in bluesy solos while engaging in wild escapades. The hymn-like “80 Tears of Joy” takes the listener to church. The song starts slowly and meditatively, then picks up pace, the instruments coming together in an upsurge reminiscent of a dynamic gospel choir (Camargo’s grandfather was a Baptist preacher). Her trumpet wails, moans and expresses joy. DeFrancesco’s soulful organ playing is unrivaled, especially when his instrument takes center stage. Neal Hefti’s “Splanky”, a swinging Basie tribute, will have you tapping your feet. The interplay between Camargo’s plunger-muted trumpet and Miller’s trombone is extraordinary. “Tenderness Within” radiates gentleness and heartfelt emotion, showcasing exceptional solos by the leader and Castro. “Dance of the Merrymaker” is fast-paced and exuberant with a jubilant energy of shouting and clapping that will transport you to a New Orleans parade. DeFrancesco’s organ is unquestionably at its most expressive here.

Camargo named Louis Armstrong as one of her musical influences. Her aptitude and storytelling approach to playing the trumpet would certainly have made him proud.

For more info visit jazz.org/watch-listen-discover/blue-engine-records. Camargo is at *Dizzy’s Club* Mar. 24 (with *Future of Jazz Orchestra*) and Mar. 27-30 (with *DIVA Jazz Orchestra*). See Calendar.



The Light of the Mind
Muriel Grossmann (Dreamland)
by Jason Gross

Austria-born, Ibiza-based saxophonist-composer Muriel Grossmann has already had a whirlwind of a career, which began at a young age. After starting out in Paris and Vienna, she settled in Ibiza, Spain in the early millennium, releasing albums on her own Dreamland label since 2007. She also received support from modern rock icon Jack White (who released a recent album of hers) and legendary techno artist DJ Gilles Patterson, in addition to releasing tribute records to Miles Davis and Ornette Coleman. Though her first albums showed her embracing intricate jazz fusion, by 2016’s *Natural Time*, Grossmann effortlessly glided into spiritual jazz in the vein of middle-period Coltrane.

On *The Light of the Mind*, Grossmann (who plays tenor, alto, soprano, baritone, flutes, harp, tamboura, harmonium and percussion) leads a quartet featuring long-time bandmates Radomir Milojkovic (guitar) and Uros Stamenkovic (drums) along with recently added Spanish keyboardist Abel Boquera. On album opener, the meditative “Pointing Out - Part 1”, Boquera creates a swirling atmosphere in which Grossmann’s tenor gently sails over. In contrast, the 12-minute title track is more of an R&B shuffle (reminiscent of Lee Morgan) showcasing the leader’s sensual playing, leading up to a forthright, confident solo (with subtle bits of harp playing in the background), followed by a light-fingered workout by Milojkovic and a lithe turn by Boquera on Hammond B-3 organ before the group returns to the song’s theme. “Unison Unveiled” sports a funky New Orleans jam beat, reminiscent of The Meters, along with bits of tamboura drone from Grossmann, who then adds in some honking soprano on top, leading to her extended wailing solo. “Ultimate Awareness” takes us back to the record’s tranquil start with light smatterings of percussion as well as Grossmann’s harp, tamboura and gentle soprano stylings. The graceful flute intro to “Eternal Laughter” shifts to another R&B-flavored workout featuring the saxophonist’s spirited alto playing this time, and another pair of similarly rousing solos from her bandmates, Boquera here leaning into a prog-rock performance. Contrasting with its namesake, “Pointing Out - Part 2” is a solemn march with Grossmann returning to the theme forcefully and triumphantly on tenor, over delicate harp undercurrents, along with Boquera’s stately, spacey organ.

Though widely varied, *The Light of the Mind* is yet another consistent, self-assured release by Grossmann and her collaborators.

For more info visit murielgrossmann.com

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