

IN PRINT



Ne Me Quitte Pas (A Song by Jacques Brel and Interpreted by Nina Simone and Others)
Maya Angela Smith (Duke University Press)
by Anna Steegmann

Maya Angela Smith's 152-page book *Ne Me Quitte Pas* begins with her personal connection to the renowned song. First captivated in high school from the rendition by Nina Simone (who died 23 years ago next month at age 70), Smith's appreciation for the song deepened along with her love for the French language. She was also the only Black student in her college French class, when a professor introduced her to the original version by Belgian singer-songwriter, Jacques Brel. Now, as a professor of French at the University of Washington, Smith shares "Ne Me Quitte Pas" with her students and readers of this published book from last year, which highlights the song's enduring cultural significance.

"Ne Me Quitte Pas" stands as a haunting and poetic plea for a lover not to leave. Written by Brel in 1959, the song gained widespread acclaim following his 1966

performance on French TV. Smith explores how the song has transcended language, culture and identity, having been covered over 1,650 times and performed in nearly 30 languages. The 1966 English version was written and sung by American poet-singer Rod McKuen, whose adaptation is highlighted for its shift in tone, transforming the emotion from despair to hope. While Edith Piaf, Brel's mentor, famously disliked the song, Simone was deeply moved and brought to tears by it, even before understanding the lyrics. Through persuasive prose, Smith provides a multifaceted analysis of the song, capturing its evolution as a cultural phenomenon. She illustrates how it acts as a vessel for translation, bridging not only French and English, but also marginalized identities and mainstream culture. The book pays special attention to Simone, whose haunting interpretation infuses the song with profound emotional depth, shaped by her experiences as a Black woman in a racist America.

Smith intertwines her personal journey of discovering the song with broader themes surrounding the complexities of interpreting art across cultures and the challenges of translation. She demonstrates how various artists and communities have adapted the song and focuses on female and queer performers who challenge traditional gender roles by reimagining "Ne Me Quitte Pas". The book also features Smith's analysis of flamboyant performances by biracial Welsh singer Shirley Bassey, as well as the song's numerous adaptations for film and stage.

For more info visit dukeupress.edu



Collusion and Collaboration
Kelsey Mines/Vinny Golia (Relative Pitch)
Everything Sacred, Nothing Serious
Kelsey Mines (OA2)
by Andrew Schinder

Seattle has one of America's most diverse and well-established experimental music scenes, providing a striking comparison now to the city's over-analyzed grunge explosion of the early '90s. Indeed, among the current whole, the former logging city has a pretty impressive under-the-radar jazz scene. Bassist Kelsey Mines, who was born and raised in The Emerald City, fits right within the progressive ethos of its music community. Over the past decade or so, Mines has traversed across wide-ranging genres and stylings. She has dabbled in lo-fi electro-pop and classical chamber music, and is currently a member of the indie rock supergroup Drink the Sea with (among others) R.E.M.'s Peter Dinklage. These projects may possess varying degrees of accessibility, but they are never uninteresting.

This past year, the prolific Mines (who recently has moved to NYC) released several new recordings, none of which fit together and all of which reflect the exciting range that she continuously displays. On *Collusion and Collaboration*, she partners with legendary free-form, avant garde multi-instrumentalist Vinny Golia on a series of stripped-down, minimalist,

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