



Marina
Lena Bloch/Kyoko Kitamura (Fresh Sound)
Memory Ghosts
Yoon Sun Choi/Jacob Sacks (Yeah-Yeah)
KYN
KYN (ears&eyes)
by Elijah Shiffer

Some of the most interesting vocal jazz is actually created by musicians who minimize the distinctions between various types of vocalizing. The vocalists on these three recent releases display exquisite control of their instruments in verbal and non-verbal singing, spoken word and extended techniques—all at their command to combine into truly memorable music.

The most straightforward, from a jazz standpoint, is *Marina*, by Russia-born, NYC-based tenor/soprano saxophonist Lena Bloch's quintet featuring Kyoko Kitamura (vocals), Jacob Sacks (piano), Ken Filiano (bass) and Michael Sarin (drums). The album's seven tracks are Bloch's musical settings (and English translations) of poems by the early 20th-century Russian poet Marina Tsvetaeva. The life of an outsider, rejecting the constraints of society, is a constant subject in Tsvetaeva's writing and is expressed fittingly in this music. Bloch's light yet tough timbre (especially on soprano), Sacks and Filiano's wildly-inventive soloing, and Sarin's thoughtful punctuations, combine to create a free-wheeling, flexible ensemble sound with seamless integration of composed and improvised elements throughout. Kitamura's expressive voice is perfect for these passionate poems; in a few places, she adds delay and echo effects for a satisfying element of the surreal. Her one wordless improv, "I Refuse", is a fiery duet with Filiano, which opens the album.

Memory Ghosts also features Sacks, in the pianist's fourth recording with vocalist Yoon Sun Choi. In this extraordinary album, the duo presents a vast range of moods and textures. Two broad, contrasting themes run through the 13 tracks. Several songs present somber, elegiac depictions of conflict or personal loss; Choi's own "I Don't Remember the War" and "Accordion Man" fall into this category. These haunting ballads are the album's most powerful tracks, even for a recording that includes both Abel Meeropol's "Strange Fruit" (recited as a poem, without the original melody) and Randy Newman's "Political Science". Four free improvisations and the traditional children's song "I Bought Me a Cat" show a very different side of the duo: an exuberant playfulness and zany sense of humor, with excellent comedic timing in the latter. This album is nearly guaranteed to make the listener cry and laugh in equal measure.

In the trio KYN, Choi is joined by equally unique vocalists Hanna Schörken and Noa Fort. Their self-titled debut is a fascinating document of the human voice's full potential as an instrument. Though a relatively short album, with the seven entirely improvised tracks adding up to just over 30 minutes, this is plenty of time for the trio to explore a wide variety of sonic landscapes. Each vocalist takes an immediately recognizable approach, with Fort focusing on melodic lines, Schörken using a lot of percussive consonants and Choi combining both and adding some intense overtone-singing. However, the interplay between them is very tightly connected; they borrow from one another's vocabularies as their sounds meld together. In the more active tracks, voices serve as aliens at play; others, such as the aptly named "Wicca Dance", are full of abstracted folk-song melody. Even on this latter track, harmony and tonality are rarely kept separate from whimsical noise. An important part of what makes this album work is KYN's willingness to

shift between these, and many forms of vocalization in between, at any given moment.

For more info visit freshsoundrecords.com, yeahyeahrecords.bandcamp.com and earsandeyesrecords.com.

Lena Bloch is at Ibeam Brooklyn Mar. 14. Kyoko Kitamura is at Looove Annex Mar. 14 (with *Geometry of Distance*) and Mar. 15 (with William Parker's *Pocket Watch Orchestra*), and Downtown Music Gallery Mar. 24. Noa Fort's *Plant People* is at Brooklyn Artery Mar. 7. Fort and Yoon Sun Choi are at Downtown Music Gallery Mar. 24 and Ibeam Brooklyn Mar. 26. See Calendar.



Extended Daydream
Lisa Hilton (Ruby Slippers Productions)
by Andrew Schinder

Pianist Lisa Hilton has made Southern California her home for much of her life. As such, her new album, *Extended Daydream*, consistently brings to mind visions of the Golden State. Lisa Hilton once again engineers a sunny, organic modernization of the timeless piano-driven small ensemble. Self-taught on classical piano, she was formally schooled in the visual arts, and that training is evident on this release as she leads the listener on an impressionistic journey through auditory colors, with the destination a vibrant, variegated Malibu sunset.

Throughout the album, the leader also generously showcases her bandmates: J.D. Allen (tenor), Igmarr Thomas (trumpet), Luques Curtis (bass) and Rudy Royston (drums), none more so than on the opening track, the Miles Davis standard "So What". Here Hilton largely disappears after a few opening piano-driven measures and then like Paul Chambers on the famously bass-forward original, Curtis seizes control of the song and cooks, amped up by this rendition's modern mix. Thomas, who in recent years has been largely splitting his time between big bands and hip-hop, delivers a spot-on Miles impression that harkens back to the master's creation of the modal form. "So What" aside, the session largely consists of Hilton originals, which offer an impressive stylistic range that keeps an overall reflective tone. "Monumental Mystery" is a lot of fun, and as its title would suggest, the song evokes a Nancy Drew/Hardy Boys ethos wherein our intrepid heroes may have bitten off a bit more than they could chew. Royston and Curtis provide a crackerjack, batty rhythm, with Hilton's piano creeping in between brass hooks. "Tropical Tuesday" and "It's Just for Now" offer the pianist's riffs on bossa nova, with considerable sophistication. "Seabirds" is a gorgeous, atmospheric ballad where she, Allen and Thomas trade off with emotional, moving phrasing. "Wildflower" is a jazz interpretation of the massive hit by pop star Billie Eilish, and while it may seem like an unlikely cover, Eilish in fact has roots in jazz and has offered her own jazz interpretations in her work throughout her career (including a memorable cover of Peggy Lee's version of "Fever" with bassist Christian McBride and the Count Basie Orchestra). With Hilton, the pop "Wildflower" beautifully transitions into the jazz idiom. Eilish's vocals are replaced by the lovely chemistry among Hilton, Allen and Thomas—and the jazz genre once again proves itself malleable and versatile.

For more info visit lisahiltonmusic.com

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