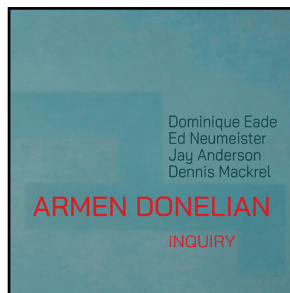


of the altered tones in the mid-to-upper range. The result (especially clear on “Echolord” and “One for Blake”) juxtaposes solid bass notes with sounds that buzz, shimmer and fracture into unusual colors. Even the most heavily altered notes feel purposeful; Sánchez never lets the effect take over the music.

Repetition is one of the album’s main structural tools, and Sánchez finds remarkably different uses for it. The opener, “Frost Bloom”, pairs strong bass notes with altered tones that blur and soften the instrument’s usual attack. Small changes to repeated figures continually highlight the differences between prepared and unprepared sounds. On “Inward Loop”, repetition becomes a source of tension and drama. The layering of heavy bass, circling upper-register motifs and piercing unaltered tones, creates an almost hypnotic effect. By contrast, “Snowing In The Woods” unfolds patiently, its slower pacing and delicate textures creating a sense of stillness and reflection.

*For the Space You Left* succeeds not because of its concept, but because of Sánchez’ ability to find new expressive possibilities within a deliberately limited palette. Using essentially the same setup across all nine of the album’s tracks, she creates a remarkable variety of colors, textures and emotional registers. The result is a *tour de force* of solo piano that reveals solitude not as a quiet or simple state of being, but as an experience filled with tension, beauty, persistence and contradiction.

For more info visit [outofyourheadrecords.com](http://outofyourheadrecords.com). Sánchez is at Ornithology Jazz Club Jul. 13 (as leader), Dizzy’s Club Jul. 16 (with Yuhan Su) and St. Luke’s Episcopal Church (East Hampton, NY) Jul. 19 (part of Hamptons Jazz Festival). See Calendar and 100 Miles Out.



*Inquiry*  
Armen Donelian (Sunnyside)  
by Fred Bouchard

In Armen Donelian’s thirteenth album in over three decades for Sunnyside (the label founded in 1982 by François Zalacain), the Brooklyn-born pianist presents an unusual, highly personal project. What began as an introspective solo piano study, gradually morphed into a somber studio inquiry, enlisting four bandmates, often in layered overdubs, intense in its fathomless darkness and somber in its grief.

Donelian values his piano sound as “a refuge, a safety zone, a spacious place where soul-searching is welcomed and supported.” His music expresses gratitude towards his mentors, notably late piano innovator Richie Beirach (1947-2026), deep thanks to soulful colleagues, and righteous disdain towards immoral politicians. Piano solos lead us in: from “Beyond”, a simple, deep melody, possibly a rear-view coda to his 60-year career, laced with gravity and sadness, to “Somewhere” (Bernstein’s *West Side Story* anthem), which summons a flutter of birdsong from Messaien’s *Catalogue des Oiseaux*.

From that point, most tracks feature Donelian’s trio – with Jay Anderson (bass) and Dennis Mackrel

(drums)—formed in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. Just as Donelian’s calm demeanor and principled interpretations once applied soothing balm for saxophonist Billy Harper and percussionist Mongo Santamaria, today his chosen collaborators reflect styles arching towards congenial introspection and mutual empathy. Miles Davis/Bill Evans’ iconic “Blue in Green” welcomes Dominique Eade, a vocalist of rare expressive depth, who, after a warm bass solo, reinterprets Cassandra Wilson’s lyrics exquisitely. “Aqua Reminiscence”, untethering Anderson and Eade, floats free as its spacy stepchild, “Dark Moon”, which is a bizarre, minor-key transformation of Beethoven’s “Moonlight Sonata” into a wasted battlefield, trod by longtime colleague Ed Neumeister as a haunted survivor, wielding his trombone with plunger or hat mute. “What Is” is a blithely skipping 6/8 tribute to meditation practice, pentimentos all around. “Petite Triste”, a wistful waltz à la Nino Rota, unites Mackrel’s brushed cymbals, Donelian’s glissandi and an echoey Eade. “Weeping Willow” pairs two piano parts with bass in mixing session magic as haunting as *Twin Peaks*. “Too Soon Gone” is an austere solo salute to Yvonne Ervin, the late, ebullient, tireless jazz advocate and presenter, who passed away in 2018 at the age of 59. For his deep-dive centerpiece “Inverted Reality”, Donelian summons all to a swirling musical maelstrom, quietly commending political outrage at rampant greed and flagrant humanitarian indignities.

For more info visit [sunnysiderecords.com](http://sunnysiderecords.com). Donelian plays solo at Bryant Park’s Piano Jazz Series Jul. 13-16 and Isaan Thai Star (Hudson, NY) Sundays. See Calendar and 100 Miles Out.



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