

Sounds and Cries of the World
Jen Shyu & Jade Tongue (Pi)
 by Ken Waxman

Vocalist and multi-instrumentalist Jen Shyu, one of many musicians of Asian heritage interpolating currents from Eastern cultures into American-based improvised music, approaches the task earnestly, rejecting surface exoticism. While she may sing in Javanese, Korean, Tetum (from East Timor), Indonesian or English, no attempt is made to reproduce traditional frameworks. Besides piano, she accompanies herself on gat kim (2-string Taiwanese lute), gayageum (12-string Korean zither), kkwaenggwari (Korean gong) and kemanak (Javanese idiophone), integrated with Mat Maneri's viola, Ambrose Akinmusire's trumpet, Thomas Morgan's upright bass and Dan Weiss' drums.

On "Bloom's Mouth Rushed In" and "Aku Yang Lahir Dari Air Mata | Bâwâ Sidâ Asih", Shyu's soaring yelps are doubled by Akinmusire's glossy effervescence and she appropriates bell-shaped tones when singing the English lyrics to "Mother of Time". Vocalizing in Korean on the same tune, Shyu swallows her tones yet is in perfect sync with desolate idiophone cracks. Her double-tracked delivery on the mystical "She Held Fire" is amplified by strident trumpet notes and reinforced by drum beats, so that the message becomes as affecting as grieving widows' wails.

The capstone comes with pieces about the East Timor wars: "Rai Nakukun Ba Dadauk Ona" and "Song for Naldo". The former, sung in Tetum as she wallops the piano keys, is as theatrically wrenching as a gospel preacher testifying. Shyu is equally impassioned in the Tetum lyrics for "Song for Naldo", but when switching to English pure anger pours through her recitation of the atrocities inflicted on the East Timorese people. Western instruments insert melancholy stresses on the concluding "Thoughts of Light and Freedom", providing closure to the previous vocal passion.

For more information, visit pirecordings.com. This project is at Roulette Mar. 28th. Shyu is also at The Met Breuer Mar. 6th. See Calendar.



Spark
Hiromi (Telarc)
 by Elliott Simon

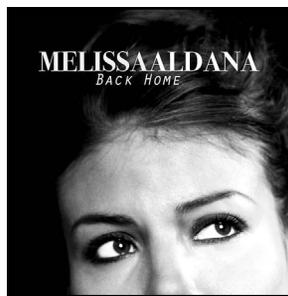
Spark is a high-energy release from pianist Hiromi and her Trio Project of six-string bass guitarist Anthony Jackson and drummer Simon Phillips. Many of these nine tunes, more aptly called excursions, begin with Hiromi stating and restating a catchy riff that Jackson and Phillips support and color. Even without the occasional keyboards, the trio sounds larger than it is.

The title cut begins with a deceptively innocent toy-like piano solo, which turns into a wide keyboard vista over which Hiromi throws out her first riff. The rhythm section then provides the "Spark" that shatters the innocence through a powerful musical statement.

Crisp drumming matches Hiromi's rapid percussive style in both precision and speed, a repartee defining several tunes. This refrain continues on the quick-stepping "In a Trance", Phillips and Hiromi showcasing powerful chops as the tune morphs into a Latin burner.

Both "Take me Away" and "Indulgence" are respites. The former benefits from a lovely free-floating piano figure while the latter is a leisurely forum for Jackson and Hiromi to explore time. The pace picks up again with "Wonderland", a stylistically diverse tune centered on Phillips' tuned toms, before "Dilemma", a standout, dramatically alternates muscle and nuance to delve into uncertainty. Jackson's pump and Hiromi's keyboards flaunt carefree funkiness on "What Will Be, Will Be" before "Wake Up and Dream", a surprisingly tender solo piano piece, presages the upbeat togetherness of closer "All's Well". *Spark* draws its energy from the interaction of Hiromi's precision, clarity and speed with Phillips' detail-oriented drumming and Jackson's unique melodic facility for an exciting, well-put together statement.

For more information, visit concordmusicgroup.com. This project is at Highline Ballroom Mar. 30th-31st.



Back Home
Melissa Aldana (Word of Mouth Music)
 by Thomas Conrad

There is a buzz on the street about Melissa Aldana. In 2013 she won the Thelonious Monk Competition and placed first in the "Rising Star/Tenor Saxophone" category of the *DownBeat* Critics Poll in 2015.

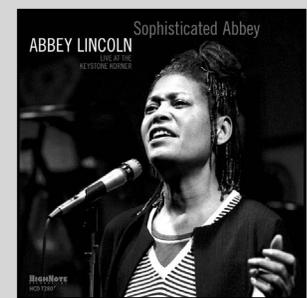
The buzz is legit. *Back Home* is her second album in the pure, austere format of the saxophone trio, where there is nowhere to hide. Aldana has the goods: an abundance of stimulating ideas; improvisational instinct for whole forms; patience and timing of a natural storyteller. The first and last tracks, "Alegria" and "Back Home", are tributes to Wayne Shorter and Sonny Rollins, respectively. The former deals with the complexities of joy and starts with a celebratory outcry that soon contains yearning; one link to Shorter is that Aldana phrases asymmetrically, in bursts between cryptic pauses. The latter is somewhat like a stop-and-start Rollins calypso and also recalls the saxophonist in its wit and extravagance, its endless variations flowing like a river. But Aldana sounds like herself. She likes the upper register. Her tone and touch are subtle, clear and firm. She rarely wastes notes.

Her colleagues here, bassist Pablo Menares and drummer Jochen Rueckert, are full creative participants. They wrote four of the tunes and Aldana wrote four others. Menares' "Desde La Lluvia" and Rueckert's "Obstacles" show, respectively, that this trio can swing intensely within a halting waltz or fly at several high speeds. The only standard is Kurt Weill-Ira Gershwin's "My Ship". It is a paradoxical truth that jazz musicians often reveal more about themselves in great songs written by others than in their own compositions. The freshness of Aldana's conception, her airy freedom with melody, is fully apparent.

A huge plus is the recorded sound achieved by engineer James Farber at Sear Sound in Manhattan, the trio set up in one room, with no isolation. This approach entails risks, but here it works beautifully.

For more information, visit wommusic.com. This project is at Birdland Mar. 30th-31st. See Calendar.

UNEARTHED GEM



Sophisticated Abbey (Live at the Keystone Korner)
Abbey Lincoln (HighNote)
 by Anders Griffen

Abbey Lincoln first built her presence in the jazz world in the '50s. While she didn't maintain her prominence much later than 1962 (until signing with Verve in the early '90s), it would be a mistake to think she was idle. Throughout the '60s, Lincoln continued to be a dedicated activist while her acting career thrived. In 1964, she co-starred with Ivan Dixon in *Nothing But A Man* and in 1968 with Sidney Poitier in *For Love of Ivy*. The '70s found her back in Los Angeles, where she conducted research and did writing that would inform much of the music she was yet to create. She also made numerous stage and TV appearances (including episodes of *All In The Family* and *Mission Impossible* and *Black Omnibus* hosted by James Earl Jones), was an Assistant Professor at California State-Northridge and traveled to Africa with Miriam Makeba where she was given the name Aminata by the President of Guinea and Moseka by Zaire's Minister of Information.

Her work wasn't always musical in nature, but all of her efforts are at some point reflected in her music, whether in her lyrics or the way she embodies a song. As radio host David Jaye observes in his notes to this album, "she becomes the lyrics, she breathes out deeply felt words—sometimes weaving a labyrinthine set of emotions eliciting long-dormant memories, fears and joys of our own." This was Lincoln's strength and she worked diligently to develop it, including a longtime study of etymology; she had a sophisticated understanding of a word's history and meaning. This increasingly informed her performances as well as her lyrics. Ultimately, her intellect served the expression of her soul.

This appearance at Keystone Korner marks the beginning of Lincoln's music reclaiming the vanguard of her livelihood. She recorded *Painted Lady* (Blue Marge, or *Golden Lady* on Inner City) with Archie Shepp on Feb. 4th, 1980, one month before this performance, and that original song swings hard to open this set. Her association with pianist Phil Wright dates back to 1957 and the whole group, completed by James Leary (bass) and Doug Sides (drums), displays tremendous rapport. "Long As You're Living", an Oscar Brown, Jr. song Lincoln originally recorded for her 1959 release *Abbey Is Blue* is a blues groove in five. The band really gets into it and Sides plays a fantastic solo over the piano and bass. There are a number of spectacular ballads where Lincoln employs punctilious textures and Wright mines the harmonies with inventive improvisations that continually engage the listener. Lincoln's "People In Me" brings the tempo up again in its celebration of diversity. She also does her unique renderings of "God Bless The Child" and Stevie Wonder's "Golden Lady". The medley of "The Nearness Of You/For All We Know" is a highlight in an outstanding set. With great live sound in an intimate setting, a nuanced program and a killing band, this is truly an unearthed gem.

For more information, visit jazzdepot.com