



After Dark
Amanda Whiting (Jazzman)
by Eric Wendell

It would be easy to void the beautiful timbre of the harp in jazz, seeing as it is rarely a featured soloist in jazz ensembles. On Welsh harpist Amanda Whiting's *After Dark*, her first full-length album after a 2020 10" EP, she proves that between the beauty and the brawn of the harp lies a language that is astonishingly pure and powerful.

What makes *After Dark* so successful is how the harp is showcased on every track. Whiting makes sure listeners hear the full spectrum of what the harp is capable of within the jazz language, placing herself in different instrumental settings throughout.

Opener "Time Stands Still" has Whiting alongside flutist Chip Wickham, the former's fanciful voicings blending beautifully with the latter's light touch. By opening with an airy number, Whiting is almost setting the listener up with something to be expected from the harp and its ethereal atmosphere.

That brief opener segues into "Messed Up", a trio number with bassist Aidan Thorne and drummer John Reynolds where the seemingly endless melodic character of the harp's intimate and lively sound is evident. Whiting and Reynolds are especially in sync

on "Who Knows", which begins abstractly before developing into a beautiful dialogue among the trio.

Whiting is at her best on the title track, which ebbs and flows through foreboding moods before developing into a deep groove. The space Whiting allows shows the harp's impressive agility with cinematic and creative use of ambiance. Whiting is at her most unbridled on "The Feist", where she lets loose with Thorne and Reynolds following suit, the album reaching its highest energy. A similar feeling is felt on "Just Blue", where an unrestrained Whiting offers the date's most playful moments.

While each track blends with an impressive flow, *After Dark* never does truly venture outside of expectation. One hopes Whiting will allow herself more opportunities to experiment on future releases.

For more information, visit jazzmanrecords.co.uk



Union
Muriel Grossmann (Dreamland)
by Elliott Simon

Saxophonist Muriel Grossmann is the consummate combination of jazz spirituality, blues and funk. While directing her band to maintain a modern creative groove, she beckons John Coltrane's spirit with a single

note. Her previous works, like *Momentum* (Dreamland, 2017), portrayed an evolving journey, which began at the beginning and ended in enlightenment, but the five cuts on *Union* are all defined destinations. She is again joined by Radomir Milojkovic (guitar), Llorenç Barceló (Hammond organ) and Uros Stamenkovic (drums). Barceló, especially with the absence of a dedicated bassist, is indispensable in expressing the funk and maintaining the groove in these new versions of previously released tunes.

Recorded in studio, the session impresses with the immediacy of a live performance. Grossmann's protocol is to use her fellow musicians rhythmically and melodically to establish a setting and then, through impressive tonal mastery, push that setting to a higher spiritual plane. Such is the case on opener "Happiness" as Milojkovic and Barceló stretch out to meet the state of grace that Grossmann attains on tenor. With equal nods to Coltrane and Al Kooper, Grossmann is 'Her Holy Modal Highness' on "Traneing In" as she skips a quick soprano saxophone flight to the beat of a surprisingly countrified guitar riff. The quartet then reflects on "Sundown", which is elegantly experienced through Stamenkovic's lovely percussive coloration.

"African Dance" is a deliciously funky romp but even in these environs, Grossmann uses her alto to reach modal grandeur. The closing title cut is a holistic bluesy group meditation, soprano traversing that is which without end as an expert astronomer uses a telescope to search the cosmos for new planetary bodies. When Coltrane said he had found a way into a new kind of music this is what he was talking about. If you haven't yet heard Muriel Grossmann, *Union* is the place to start.

For more information, visit murielgrossmann.com

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