

A great wine is the sum of many parts, not the least of which is what wine makers refer to as *terroir*: the characteristics imparted to a vintage by the natural environment in which the grapes are grown. Wine connoisseurs will search long and far for a bottle grown on a particular hilltop in Bordeaux or a Chardonnay from a certain vineyard in Napa Valley, where the wind blows hard across the grapes, toughening them and imparting a taste that is different than a vineyard just a few meters away. Much may be done to the wine in the process of production, but the imprint of its *terroir* will remain, creating an identity not shared by any other vintage.

In similar fashion, musicians are a confluence of their environments, from their earliest experiences to their formal training to what is transpiring in the present moment. This is especially so when improvised music is at play, when the artist uses intuition to open herself to every moment she has lived. On *Agua*, a remarkable, fully improvised recording from pianist Marina Albergo, we hear an artist channeling a life, from the streets of her native Barcelona to world travels with her prominent musical family to the snowcapped vistas of her adopted Seattle home. There is a reason Marina has released this recording as part of her *A Life Soundtrack* series and if we listen carefully, we hear everything we need to get to know this distinct improviser more deeply.

Agua, like its namesake, seems to flow like water from Marina's fingers. While she calls it a fully improvised recording, it is never makeshift, always grounded in the past, the present, even the future. In *Agua* we have much to revel in: melodies that, though improvised, seem hauntingly familiar, harmonic landscapes that recall every epoch from Bach to Debussy to Monk, and grooves that get into our bodies, Marina's beloved Flamenco never too far off the sonic horizon. Virtuosity and intellect are present, heard powerfully on a track like *Agua Clara*, but so are pathos, joy, and even humor. (Listen to *Indiana* a few times and tell me that ending doesn't make you laugh!) There is something in these 10 tracks that feels simultaneously surprising and inevitable, as if we are on a journey that has no particular destination yet seems like home when we arrive.

The journey is not Marina's alone. She brings along Hans Tuber, a saxophonist with his own special *terroir* who has clocked significant time with Marina through their work together in the orchestra of Seattle's inimitable Teatro ZinZanni, a long running theater and cabaret review. There is magic between them, two poets creating a language that, alone, would not sound the same. Listen to the way they interact on *Nana del mar*, the first 90 seconds like a carefully composed song, until Marina pushes Hans into a harmonic corner that he circumvents with 2 beautifully (profoundly) placed notes, pushing the duo back onto familiar ground and then to new avenues. There is no pretense in their duo playing. They search for one another, drawing the listener into a conversation we are privileged to witness.

Agua is a recording of great beauty but not only in the way it hits our ears. It is beautiful like great wine: in the summation of its parts. The fact that it is a series of improvisations makes the summary even more impressive, as we hear Marina's environments - the terroirs of Barcelona, of travels, of Seattle - coming together to produce a vineyard of sound like no other. Thankfully, as the title of the last track suggests, the taste of this vintage will continue, getting better with each listen.

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