

Dana Reason

Angle of Vision



482 Music

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|--------------------------------|------|
| 01) Rendezvous | 5:06 |
| 02) Unmarked | 4:49 |
| 03) Paris Tango | 4:12 |
| 04) On My Way | 4:15 |
| 05) Moments with Clara | 6:50 |
| 06) Night Club Skin | 4:27 |
| 07) Angle of Vision | 4:53 |
| 08) God Bless the Child | 5:19 |
| 09) Play Ball | 3:24 |
| 10) September | 3:26 |
| 11) Transition | 3:34 |
| 12) Someday | 4:46 |

Glen Moore :: bass
Dana Reason :: piano
Peter Valsamis :: drums

All tracks by Dana Reason except
#2, Allison Johnson/Dana Reason;
#3, quoting "Adios Nonino" by Astor Piazzolla;
#5, "Drie Romanzen Opus 21" by Clara Schuman /
Dana Reason;
#6, Glen Moore; #8, Billie Holiday/Arthur Herzog;
#12, quoting "Someday My Prince Will Come"
by Frank Churchill

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Beauty and loss. They pulse through my mind like breath. Beauty, because I work in music, and loss because I'm a scholar of the Western cultural tradition — a tradition not ready to admit many of its losses. In my preoccupations I have found — on rare occasions — works, or moments in works, that take my breath away in their apparent understanding of these two realities of human experience. Some of these moments have occurred in film, like Charlie Kaufman's **Synecdoche, NY** or Guillermo del Toro's **Pan's Labyrinth** — catastrophically beautiful moments when fantasy is revealed as such, crushed with the gentlest brutality by the Real of death. These are moments when loss is presented so delicately, so **really**, and our impotent ability to fend it off with our paltry stories and superstitions revealed so starkly that I cannot help but gasp and think, "yes, thank god: humans can, at least, express this much." This album has given me such moments. Moments of exquisitely sad happiness, of joyous relief that someone has been able to express the beauty and sorrow of life that remains most often, inexpressible. Dana Reason's achingly beautiful rendering of the fantasy narrative **par excellence**, "Someday My Prince Will Come," for instance, deserves to enter the pantheon of great interpretations of that song, along with those of Bill Evans and Miles Davis. Reason's rendition captures all the existential angst and beauty and fragility and breathtaking loss and hope-against-impossible-odds that is romantic love and its inability to last as long as we think it should — that is, forever. Never have I heard the melancholy and loss inherent in the wish for a future that may never come so poignantly revealed as in Reason's version.

Reason's compositional style takes fragments of melody (her own and others) and builds them into a whole, cubistically or collage-like, like a crystal forming organically from earth. Her ability to transmit a fragile melancholy through sound brings to my mind Jeff Buckley or Jon Brion, her fondness for expansive vistas, film composer Gustavo Santaolalla or Keith Jarrett; she evokes Bill Evans's delicate touch, Marilyn Crispell's creative energy, and the compositional nuance of Chopin and Debussy. Dissonance appears in the exact right place, striking a brief but intense moment of despair: it does not continue, but it lingers. Conversely, moments of darkness will suddenly break into light. These supple turns of harmonic phrase surprise and then appear beautifully precise, apposite. And there are moments in the album that swell with such romance that you start to imagine falling in love

with someone, anyone. You envision yourself pulling off the road, right then and there, and proposing in some tearful, this-is-a-love-for-all-of-eternity type of way and you don't want your commute to end and start thinking of another highway to take. Then the raindrops gently falling on the windshield reveal themselves to be the piano coming out of your speakers and you realize that they have always been. Moments when you just want to cry out: "Sadness, sadness, oh, beautiful sadness!"

The deepest melancholy of this album is not of unrequited romantic love, however. In "Moments with Clara" Reason expresses feelings that are rarely spoken of: the deep loss of the creative woman who cannot find an avenue for her love, who wants to offer and develop her gift and yet faces obstacles again and again, obstacles that in the end become insurmountable. And even if such a magnificent woman is recognized in her lifetime, gendered histories render her again invisible. "Moments with Clara" is Reason's conversation with Clara Schumann, an enormously talented pianist who gave up her dream to be a composer, doubting her capability because she was a woman. Schumann wrote: "I once believed that I possessed creative talent, but I have given up this idea; a woman must not desire to compose — there has never yet been one able to do it. Should I expect to be the one?" The tragedy that has befallen (and still befalls) gifted young girls as they develop into women and, through various pressures, leave their creativity behind, is profoundly heartbreaking. It is the loss experienced by women artists who love their art so passionately and yet find themselves again and again on the wrong side of the gender divide. Reason describes this extraordinary piece of music (my favorite on the album, even surpassing "Someday") as "two women talking like musicians and artists." Beginning with Schumann's melody from "Drei Romanzen für Pianoforte" Op. 21 Reason moves into a piece of such stunning grace and sadness that in parts I could only hold my breath, suspended in time by the depth of the music.

Reason also employs this dialogism in her reading of Allison Johnson's piece, "Unmarked," from Johnson's chamber opera about the former slave turned real estate entrepreneur and philanthropist, Biddy Mason. Opening with Johnson's work and then offering her response, the piece has a meditative expansiveness that evokes the American West, perhaps suggestive of Mason's move from Georgia to California. Similarly, "Paris Tango" is a loose reading of Astor Piazzolla's "Adios Nonino,"

a requiem for his grandfather. Reason's particular technique is a new approach to musical "re-use," somewhere between the European classical and African American-influenced popular traditions of music. It is not quite covering, nor re-mixing, but it is also not the "folk" borrowing that has characterized classical music. In its use of fragments and hints of melodies I am tempted to call it postmodern; however, it is much more organic sounding than most postmodern work because it does not self-consciously point to its re-use. It incorporates; it brings the work in to make a new body. And my sense is that Reason would welcome a similar re-use of her melodies as source material for other composers.

The CD is not all teardrops and heartstrings, of course. "Transition" heads into Marilyn Crispell and Cecil Taylor territory. Drummer Peter Valsamis — fantastic throughout the album — particularly shines on this piece. He also propels the group with sizzling brushes on "Play Ball." A Latin groove with an initial "I'll Remember April" feel, the tune turns from a simple standard progression toward surprising twists and rhythmic hits, from upbeat to dark and back again. The trio's tight ensemble playing is showcased, with Reason and bassist Glenn Moore locking in as one on the bass line. Moore, best known for his long tenure with the band Oregon, contributed "Night Club Skin," which sounds like a haunting tone row permutation of Monk's "Ask Me Now." Taking the melody through various transformations, the tune suggests a slow motion Monk meeting Giant Steps meeting the Art Ensemble of Chicago. Moore also contributes several creative bass solos that appear in less predictable places (for example, ending a tune). Throughout the CD each player weaves from foreground to background and every place in between. They create that loose-but-gelled feel of a trio that has worked together for years (which Reason and Valsamis have).

Dana has long been an adventurous, highly creative player and her music has never been "easy listening." While in no way compromising her unique creative voice, with this CD she strips down her melodies to their most simple and stark beauty. These pieces bring into focus what she calls the "little flower in the concrete," a "surrendering of inner melodies that are not obscured by 'craft.'" Reason brings your attention to this flower. When you see it, when you hear it, you will understand how within the most tender and heartbreaking loss there also lives beauty.