

Estrogenia

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BY ALISON YOUNG ON AUGUST 27, 2019

CD REVIEW, SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER-2019

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HEART-STOPPING

"It is spectacularly refreshing to hear a new kind of sound rather than an individual one."



Estrogenia

Anna Jalkéus Group: Anna Jalkéus, harp. Self-released, 2018

Boston-based singer, composer, and harpist Anna Jalkéus had me at "Sweet child I hear you..." the first phrase of the first track in her genre-bending *Estrogenia*. Named for a self-created superhero and protector of equality, the music is an alchemy of soothing groove and dreamy landscapes.

"Mononucleosis" will crack you up, representing our fears of being completely at the mercy of external factors out of our

control. Saxophonist Aaron Dutton rocks us into a nervous, tearing-our-hair-out solo that presses all my buttons—in a good way—leading to masterfully overdubbed voices and John Sturino's funky drum solo. Ms. Jalkéus' voice is enticingly liquid, a rich mezzo thankfully free of fry even as her words get more and more emphatic.

Equally skilled as a harpist, a jazz "looseness" is her birthright having grown up with parents who founded the Swedish a capella ensemble The Real Group. Her voice and harp are so integrated inside the texture, it is spectacularly refreshing to hear a new kind of sound rather than an individual one. "Skogsråets Dans" plays on the nonsense scat syllables used in jazz, but also in Nordic folk music as a stand-in for instruments. Likely part of her childhood education, no?

"Time is Running Out" bounces in mixed-meter, Gregory Santa Croce's piano tastefully moving the music along in a captivating duet with voice, and the very fine bass solo as played by Aaron Holthus.

Another favorite is "Jupiter," which reaches for the stars in scope and otherworldliness, especially in the use of melodica doubling voice and harp in gently broken chords. Leading into "Vintgar Gorge," this kind of mystical space broadens to a lazy vocalization over harp tremolo and space-agey improvisations. Named for a rocky hidden falls in Slovenia, one that pours water steadily into emerald pools, the piece is an audio interpretation of mist and cataracts rushing over carved limestone. It is likely the most stunning work on the disc with Ethan Stallbaum's guitar morphed into another vocal line, soulful and yearning.

"The Other Way" follows, and coalesces all that makes this artist unique. Ms. Jalkéus is now alone, just her voice and harp. Though intimate, she is powerful, accenting it by letting the lowest strings buzz. This one is heart-stopping in its poignancy, especially the final words as the poet wonders where she is headed: People say I have a voice, I think



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I've lost it."

The title track describes our superhero, a gal who is never going to sit down and be quiet—*Estrogenia*. It's a 1950's retro graphic novel page-turner of horns honking, noirish off-beat rhythmic energy, and a megaphone vocal leading to the wild sax playing by the talented Garrett Wingfield. The finish? A primal scream.

SHARE.



ABOUT AUTHOR

ALISON YOUNG

Alison Young is a classical music host and producer at Minnesota Public Radio/American Public Media. She left a successful career as a flutist a decade ago after she developed a neurological disorder, but before then enjoyed many years traveling the world giving recitals, performing concertos, playing with some of the finest orchestras, and recording her own discs. Nowadays, Young spins discs and is always on the lookout for the next best thing. You can contact her at ayoung@mpr.org.

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