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Jonathan Widran · Jun 5

FRANCESCO AMENTA, Midtown Walk

Francesco Amenta's dazzlingly hipster new album *Midtown Walk* has the "NYC cosmopolitan" vibe stamped all over it, from the cover of him walking confidently with his sax past tall buildings to the soulful, alternatively sensitive and bustling energy he creates with veteran pianist Cyrus Chestnut and his dynamic rhythm section of bassist Kimon Karoutzos and female drummer Gary Kerezou.

The track that best captures Amenta's love for his adopted home (since 2017) is the elegantly seductive, highly impressionistic ballad "Home," which showcases the saxophonist's keen, intuitive interplay with Chestnut after a tender, slightly bluesy piano solo intro. Yet while everything – from the whimsical, percussive opener "Dance" to the hypnotic, atmospheric and moody closing Ellington ballad "Come Sunday" – is Big Apple-centric, the eight song, hour long collection has a distinctive international flair as well, and foundational stories revealing fascinating cross cultural Euro-American jazz pollination..



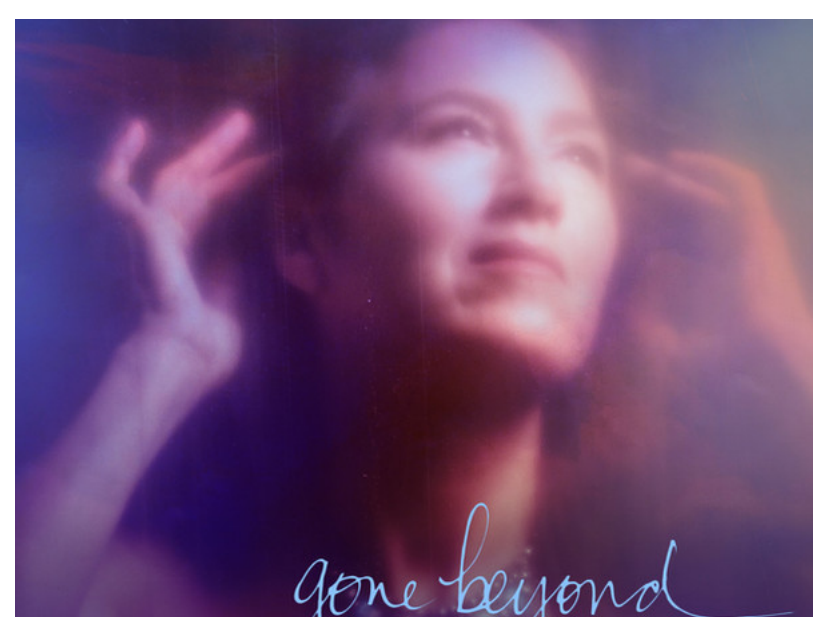
Amenta was born in Modena and trained privately with local Italian musicians and U.S. artists who lived there. He later studied in Verona and Paris before winning a spot at the prestigious Royal Conservatory in The Hague, Netherlands – where he lived and played for ten years and released his debut album in 2015. Both Karoutzos and Kerezou hail from Greece, and like Amenta, are NYC-based expats.

Along with Chestnut, they groove and sway steadily (or mightily, depending on the tempo) on "Bunch of Time" (which opens with an extended plucky bass solo by Karoutzos), the modal cooker "Number 9" (inspired by McCoy Tyner) and the lyrical "6/22," named wistfully for the date of his very first Big Apple gig and the day his father died. The heart and soul of the album, truly reflecting the musicians' lifelong journeys and the joy they get showcasing stylistic diversity are the back to back tracks, the bustling, percussive "Travelers" and the stylish New Orleans blues/swing romp "Burgundy 45."

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