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news
opinion
arts
movies
music
naked city
food
listings
classifieds
apt. search
cp events
forums
browse
win
personals
about us
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musicpicks

Angelica Sanchez Quartet

by Nate Chinen

Jazz

She traffics in a music of open spaces, muted colors, rugged ungraded terrain. Hers is a rigorous sort of almost-free jazz -- where forms aren't so much prescribed as happened upon, like a tangle of brush underfoot. Yet there's a tranquil logic to Angelica Sanchez's ideas, an almost geometric order that suggests the skyline of an urban downtown. This is music for a gleaming city in an otherwise barren land. (Is it any wonder that she was born, raised and schooled in Phoenix?)

Mirror Me (OmniTone), Sanchez's forthcoming debut, introduces a refreshingly unfussy approach to advanced composition. Not surprisingly, this has much to do with the players involved: saxophonist Tony Malaby, bassist Michael Formanek and drummer Tom Rainey. "They've all influenced me in a huge, huge way," Sanchez reports. "Being able to play with them on a regular basis, it's just been really incredible. I have a feeling it has a lot to do with how I'm writing, and the way I'm playing today."

The way Sanchez is playing today also reflects a range of other voices -- from Geri Allen (a formative influence) to Paul Bley (more for his pointillism than his touch or tone). As a pianist, she carries an unforced authority; her virtuosity (not too strong a word) is less solid than fluid, a thing of movement and ease. The same could be said, not coincidentally, of the compositions. As Sanchez puts it: "I'm trying to make it sound a little more organic than just free blowing."

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