

notorious jazz

Whenever I hear the word ambitious used by critics, I take pause, because it rings of a generosity that references an artist who has made a conscious decision to cover the music of an icon. The artist is often convinced that they have the chops to give a new life to the music; however, they are often the singers who release the adequate. And then there are those vocalists who are the light at the end of the tunnel and successfully walk into posterity. This offering by Virginia Schenck, however, happens to be a case of the latter and this is her moment.

The last time I saw this talented interpreter of lyrics I was amongst a gathering of jazz enthusiast under a beautiful Atlanta evening sky. During her set while singing Caged Bird, providence stepped forward and a small flock of birds answered her call with an appropriate and timely response. I knew a higher power was at work and everyone felt the energy pass throughout the audience. There are very few occasions when I experience a connection with nature in an urban setting as I did that night.

So to choose to pay homage to a poet of Abbey Lincoln stature was not only adventurous but exhibited a resolve that resulted in a highly rewarding experience. As I sat listening to Virginia's delivery, with each composition hope blossomed again and again into a blissful reality. This was no mere one or two listens to this compendium of songs, but a dozen or more at different times in light and darkness, at different levels of volume and not all songs at the same time. I became engrossed in the conversation between musicians and heard the joy and pain, the laughter and sadness, the troubles and the victories as each song unfolds and began feeling the spirit of Abbey in every word from this messenger.

Though the subtitle states this recording is a tribute, this is so much more. It is a conversation between Abbey and Virginia. If you are familiar with Ms. Lincoln, then you know each vocalist is holding her own tempo and pacing within the understanding of the lyrics. Ms. Schenck's choice of compositions were well thought out, with a precision that compliments her voice and clearly represents thirteen of Abbey's best. To be true to the emotion and exhibit every side of the composer, these musicians invite you to be privy to the conversation between poet and vocalist.

Virginia hangs with a few of Atlanta's best in the recording studio for a session that may appear perfunctory, however, it is the banked talent that makes it look and sound effort-

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less in their execution that allows one to hear the voice until it's time for the musicians to shine. With Kevin Bales tickling the 88, Rodney Jordan walking the bass, Marlon Patton keeping time on the drums and their special guest on alto saxophone Kebbi Williams, they bring a fresh breath of interpretation to these 13 songs. It is here that we hear the musical dialogue between the rhythm section and Virginia as they playfully emote their understandings. Kebbi's frenetic improvisation keeps pace, adding complementary emphasis to Schenck's spoken word of *The River*.

The arrangements. Listen but listen most carefully and you will hear the subtleties in the playing of piano, bass and drum that will entice you to desire more. This project goes beyond the borders of convention as collectively and individually each musician contributes their thoughts to each song that will touch, move and inspire each listener differently.

So, suffice it to say, Ms. Schenck has made a joyful noise in honoring one of America's preeminent lyricists by crossing the borders of time, race and emotion with Aminata Moseka. She has raised the bar a few feet and what she leaves behind is an indelible audible mark on the industry that she loves. I would be remiss if I didn't compel you to sit and listen, then read the liner notes for context, then listen again to truly hear the magic of Virginia and company talking to the sun.

— Carl Anthony / *Notorious Jazz* / August 28, 2017