

“Color in Motion” by Jenny Klukken

Album Review by Scott Yanow, jazz journalist/historian

While the vibraphone has a long history in jazz (starting with Lionel Hampton in 1930) and Red Norvo during the swing era showed that the xylophone also has a place in jazz, the marimba has often been underutilized. Some vibraphonists such as Bobby Hutcherson occasionally doubled on marimba, but full time jazz marimba players have always been scarce. Jenny Klukken hopes to change all of that.

She first studied classical percussion, jazz vibraphone, and drums before settling on the marimba. While she co-founded the Matra percussion group in 2012 and recorded with the ensemble in 2016, Color In Motion is Jenny Klukken’s debut recording as a leader. For this project she wrote all of the music for the set except for Chick Corea’s “Armando’s Rhumba” (which she arranged) and she utilizes a cast of versatile musicians well versed in jazz and Latin music and often classically trained.

The set begins with “Marimbista,” a happy Latin piece that, in addition to the leader, has violinist Karla Colahan and drummer-percussionist Carlomagno Araya making strong contributions. Pianist Nachito Herrera, who had almost died from Covid in 2020, contributes heroic efforts on this and two other pieces. The many arranged ensembles which build throughout “Marimbista” are particularly rewarding.

“Chapters,” which has a catchy theme and utilizes a downward phrase, evolves as it progresses and serves as a fine showcase for Jenny Klukken’s marimba and pianist Bryan Nichols. “Café Marcel” (which includes Steve Yeager on vibes) and “Song For Synnova” are atmospheric ballads that are soothing yet stimulating with quietly passionate playing by Ms. Klukken. She stars on the funky “Supernova” (which has a bit of Riley Helgesen’s trumpet) and her “La Pepica” recalls Chick Corea a bit. Corea’s classic “Armando’s Rhumba” is given a spirited and often-jubilant treatment. The memorable session concludes with the mysterious-sounding “Poison,” and the romantic and sensuous “Talus Tango.”

Color In Motion is easily recommended, particularly to listeners who did not realize that the marimba (in the right hands) can be an important instrument in jazz. This enjoyable set is an important step forward for Jenny Klukken.