

Melissa Aldana - Back Home (2016)

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01. *Alegria* 02. *Desde La Lluvia* 03. *Obstacles* 04. *En Otro Lugar* 05. *My Ship* 06. *Servant #2* 07. *Before You* 08. *Time* 09. *Back Home* Melissa Aldana (tenor saxophone) Pablo Menares (bass) Jochen Rueckert (drums)

Melissa Aldana is going to be an influential tenor saxophonist in jazz for decades to come. At 24 she won the 2013 Thelonious Monk International Jazz Competition, and followed it up with *Melissa Aldana & Crash Trio* a year later. Raised in a musical family (she was taught by her father and still plays her grandfather's horn), she was grounded in the verities and revered Sonny Rollins at a young age, but she abets her old soul with a contemporary dexterity and harmonic sophistication akin to Greg Osby or guitarist Kurt Rosenwinkel.

On *Back Home*, Aldana retains the trio format and her fellow Chilean Pablo Menares on bass while swapping in drummer Jochen Rueckert for Francisco Mela. As with *Crash Trio*, most of the songs are band originals—four by Aldana and two apiece from the rhythm section. There is a hushed intensity to the proceedings on most of these numbers, an absence of long solos or prevailing lyricism in favor of elliptical, simmering phrases and beats and clipped asides. It is music that deserves concentrated listening, but it is hard to deny the glorious relief that occurs on tracks five and nine after three or four of those compositions. The first break is the album's lone cover, Kurt Weill's "My Ship," played with a lush puissance that blends the nasal tartness of Coleman Hawkins with the bottom swell of Ben Webster. (Aldana has fond memories of playing it with her dad growing up.) The second recess, and closing track, is the title cut, a quasi-calypto written in honor of Rollins and a buoyant companion to "M&M," from *Crash Trio*.

There is much to enjoy on the more disjointed tracks as well. On "Alegria" Aldana plays with the regal repose and investigative acumen of Wayne Shorter. Menares' "Desde La Lluvia" has an elegant melody that resolves like a folksong, framing a slippery, seemingly improvised bridge in

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the middle. Rueckert's "Servant" has its swing wobbled by an intrusive vamp at various points throughout the song. This is music for musicians, purposefully tapping ingenuity instead of toe-tapping. --- Britt Robson, jazztimes.com

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