

## Liner notes for Marta Sánchez

By Ben Ratliff

Marta Sánchez's music says much about its time in jazz. In these invigorating pieces for quintet you will hear open and flowing melody lines, contrapuntal layers and baroque logic, improvised swing sitting right next to composed rigor; it sounds like a grand synthesis.

There is a New York-ish feeling of possibility through seriousness in this music, like a jam session that breaks out into a workshop. That makes sense, because Sánchez has been living and working in New York since 2011. But her music also sounds Spanish to me.

The last twenty-five years of cross-pollinated energies between New York and Barcelona, and by extension Madrid, where Sánchez grew up and started her career—young musicians coming here or going there, to study and perform and live—helps to define the record. In *Danza Imposible* you can hear traces of Brad Mehldau, an important influence on Sanchez since the late '90s, when she started trying to figure out how she could use jazz as an exit-ramp from her conservatory education. (It might not surprise listeners to discover that she was deeply invested in composition before she turned to jazz at all.) But not only Mehldau himself; you can hear the compact and insistent groove of the music in the 1990s with his trio, including the drummer Jorge Rossy, a Spaniard important to the trans-cultural exchange.

You can also hear a little of Guillermo Klein, the Argentinian jazz composer who lived and worked in Barcelona for about ten years, and with whom Sanchez studied in the late aughts. Some of the devices you hear on this record—contrapuntal layers, additive-rhythm structures, and hocketing, the practice of forming a melodic line by assigning successive notes to a number of different players—had been part of Sánchez's conservatory studies, in a classical-music context. But it was partly through Klein's examples that she was able to put them to use in her own work.

This is often the way Sánchez's writing works: she will dedicate herself to a kind of abstract design problem, or let herself be inspired by an effect or feeling that she hears in someone else's music—it could be something rhythmic, or some opposition of sounds within it—and make a rough adaptation or translation into her own vocabulary for her quintet, which includes Roman Filiú on alto saxophone, Jerome Sabbagh on tenor saxophone, Rick Rosato on bass, and Daniel Dor on drums.

"Copa de Luz" is a good example: Sánchez was inspired, she says by the pairing and entwining of saxophone lines in Eric Revis's recent record *In Memory of Things Yet Seen*. (One of the saxophonists on that record is Bill McHenry, an American who has spent a lot of time living and playing in Barcelona.) Also, she felt uncomfortable with nine-beat cycles, and resolved to write some music in nine so that she could play over them; the rhythm of Tune-Yards' song "Look Around" inspired her in that respect as well.

"Danza Imposible" is another. She had been listening to the second untitled track from Aphex Twin's *Selected Ambient Works Vol. II*—the one corresponding to a picture of a radiator in the album artwork—and made a rough translation of what Richard James was doing with digital delay: she created a theme with the notes arriving in staggered form, each one an eighth-note of a triplet behind the other. (It reminds me a little of Gjon Mili's stroboscopic photographs of dancers, or Marcel Duchamp's painting *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2*.) "I want to do something that you can't really imitate with instruments," she explains. "Then I can get to some places that I wouldn't get to otherwise. He has this delay; I wanted to imitate that with the saxophone, to try to get the same effect." But then the song changes shape, slowing down and giving way to solos by Sabbagh and by Sánchez.

"Scillar," drifting, in 4/4, was originally written for a band without bass and drums that she played in with the saxophonist Eric Trudel; in the absence of a rhythm section they prioritized shifting textures and tart intervals. "Girasol," choppy and then flowing, is written in seven, but with a triplet feeling running through it. "Board," she recalls, came from a general idea imagined by listening to the Scottish electronic-music duo Boards of Canada: steady saxophone lines over a groove with the piano articulating the melody.

"Nebulosa" is one of the last pieces she wrote for the album, and the one she most identifies with at this point in her progress. It moves slowly and mysteriously, with capricious melodic movements over a stable rhythm; it isn't giving itself away. And then a collective improvisation begins, and the song opens

up. “It’s not really free,” she explains, “but it’s rubato—we go through changes and through the form, but not in time. Sort of like a Paul Motian vibe.”

“Flesh” turns a pan-tonal tumble into a 6/8 groove, followed by hocketing passage which gives way to some of Sánchez’s most free-flowing piano improvising. And “Junk Food,” she explains, “came from some idea, something I heard with a super-slow melody in the bottom. I can’t remember where it came from, but I wanted that: a tenor playing a strong melody you can hear clearly, but the piano playing something that sounds like it’s in a different rhythm, and the bass and drums playing another thing. Like, three different planes, but you don’t know where they come together.”

The story of growth in Sanchez’s music, in the sequence from *La Espiral Amarilla* (2011), recorded not long before her departure to New York, to *Partenika* (2015) and to this record, is about the deepening complexity of her writing, along with the emerging presence of her own playing in it. These are compositions that are written expressly for quintet; they can’t be reduced. But she is figuring out ways to make her own sound flood the spaces in them and make them levitate.

—Ben Ratliff

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