



PRESS RELEASE



AMINA FIGAROVA TWELVE

IOR CD 77114-2



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| 1. NYCST 4:34 | 7. Make it Happen 4:05 |
| 2. Another Side Of The Ocean 4:40 | 8. Twelve 5:08 |
| 3. Sneaky Seagulls 3:30 | 9. New Birth 5:25 |
| 4. Shut Eyes, Sea Waves, ... 7:25 | 10. Morning Pace 6:18 |
| 5. On The Go 5:42 | 11. Leila 5:57 |
| 6. Isabelle 7:07 | 12. Maria's Request 3:46 |

Amina Figarova - piano
Bart Platteau - flute, Bb flute d'amor, bass-
flute, ocarina
Ernie Hammes - trumpet, flugelhorn
Marc Mommaas - tenor & soprano sax
Jeroen Vierdag - bass
Chris "Buckshot" Strik - drums

AMINA FIGAROVA TWELVE (IN+OUT Records)

Composer and pianist Amina Figarova's 12th album, titled *Twelve* - her debut release on the renowned independent German label In + Out - celebrates jazz as an international music and New York City as a locale where jazz gypsies may feel most at home. A suite of songs for sextet Figarova wrote swiftly in 2011 after moving with her husband and musical partner, flutist Bart Platteau, to Forest Hills, Queens from their longtime European base, *Twelve* is suffused with the heightened expectations, sense of adventure and fresh perceptions that voluntary emigrés enjoy, as well as the confidence, creative energies and nuanced fulfillment that artists gain from being in the right place at the right time.

Amina was born and raised in Baku, Azerbaijan, Bart is from Belgium, and together they are citizens of the world. They've toured extensively, developing a tight-knit ensemble that, despite inevitable personnel changes, has attained a distinctive and inimitable voice by concentrating on all-original repertoire for almost 18 years. During that period, Figarova and Platteau have lived in Rotterdam, which they found to be a comfortable if not overly challenging launching pad for their careers. Having collaborated with musicians residing in both the U.S. and Europe and having built up a circuit of welcoming venues by taking it one gig at a time, the Amina Figarova Sextet has triumphed at the main stage of the Newport Jazz Festival, been invited repeatedly to New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, won critical and audience acclaim in Chicago, Detroit, Paris, Amsterdam — and of course New York. In 2010 they decided to make the daring, big move to the States, and having arrived, they couldn't be happier.

"I feel so in balance," says Amina. "Every little thing makes more sense." Her awareness of life in focus is evident throughout *Twelve*, as her themes and backing arrangements for the complementary yet highly personalized extrapolations of Bart and also tenor/soprano saxophonist Marc Mommaas, trumpeter Ernie Hammes, bassist Jeroen Vierdag and drummer Chris "Buckshot" Strik depict subtleties of her response to the great American metropolis. From "NYCST", a tone poem about the anything-can-happen experience of late night "subway tangos" to "Maria's Request," a bass-piano-flute trio of exquisitely tender intimacy, Amina's pieces strike a perfect tone, employing genuinely beautiful harmonizations, to capture fleeting thoughts that accompany those precious moments when the puzzling jostle of daily existence comes into unexpected but deeply satisfying sync.

Some of the ideas and images that prompt Amina's writing are conceptual – such as her vision in "Another Side of the Ocean" of the earth from high above, with points marking where she's been and where she's landed. Other inspirations are as tangible as the "Sneaky Seagulls" darting around the bench she and Bart share at the beach, awaiting a chance to steal their picnic lunches. Some are Zen-like koans co-joining elements without obvious connection but with inexplicable affinity, like "Shut Eyes, Sea Waves," a title Amina says seems like a line of haiku, appropriate though not explicit or logical. Some of the songs she identifies with something personal: "Leila," for instance, is the name of her grandmother, the director of a medical institute and a woman whose personality encompassed both the impish and the stern. "Isabelle" is

Jeroen's ladyfriend, as feminine and sweet, according to Amina, as its melody. Maria of "Maria's Request" is the best friend who asked Amina for a track featuring piano and flute (here, bass flute) alone.

"On The Go" is about the peripatetic schedule Amina and Bart keep, always rushing to catch planes heading for somewhere, seldom in one place, even their residence, more than a month. "Make It Happen" refers, of course, to the just-do-it-imperative that challenges anyone approaching the Big Apple wanting to take a bite. Amina chose "Twelve" as the name for this album since the number has specific resonance: her twelfth album, with 12 songs, December her birth month and the tune's meter being 12/8. She considers "New Birth" one of her relatively straight-ahead songs, but notes that an audience member approached her after hearing it, kvelling about its dew-like sparkle. "Morning Pace" is about the luxurious security of awakening on a Sunday with little to do except exactly what one wants to.

Much of the sparkle and also substance of Twelve comes from Amina's piano playing. Her touch is wonderfully unforced, graceful and articulate, unhurried and sure. She doesn't go out of her way to bedazzle with technical display, though it is difficult to play as she does, making crisp, light finger-dancing seem easy. Bart Platteau is heard throughout Twelve as a master flutist, though he is modest of demeanor, too, playing always for the remarkably rich yet transparent blend that he, Marc Mommaas and Ernie Hammes affect. All three are compelling soloists – Hammes has a splendid moment in "Another Side of the Ocean" when "My Favorite Things" seems right to quote; Mommaas is convincingly puckish on soprano evoking "Sneaky Seagulls" and forthright on tenor about what's required to win a place on the scene in "Make It Happen."

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Amina has high regard for her bassist's acute ear and taste, mentioning that though Jeroen Vierdag does not compose, he should, having an unerring ability to hone in on seemingly small but decisive song elements that can bear adjustment. Chris Strik is the Sextet's best-kept secret – he, too, is unerring in choice of tempi, deployment of accents, ability to propel and has great taste regarding dynamics. For the Amina Figarova Sextet's front line to blend in full glory, with Amina's piano wafting through and the rhythm team acting as one even through tricky episodes and complicated beats, means that all the ensemble members must listen closely to each other. Which, happily, they do.

"It's always been difficult to keep the members of a jazz band together," Amina realizes. "It takes strength, stubbornness and sacrifice, some of which is financial. I'm very lucky to have this ensemble ready for whatever I put before them, because they understand my music, they are loyal and they each give what they do 100 percent."

The value of sustaining such a seasoned and sensitive sextet, for composer-bandleader and listener alike, becomes obvious when music of such intricacy and refinement as Amina Figarova's is heard. We don't hear it as intricate or refined, we hear it as heartening, stimulating, resolute, inspiring and warm. We know it's hard to accomplish what this band does – as it's hard to live in New York, and hard to make jazz or any other form of creative music, dance and art anywhere. Firmly grounded, the Amina Figarova Sextet will keep moving, growing, evolving, engaging with listeners who are moved, perhaps, to eagerly anticipate Thirteen.

"A skilled and imaginative composer...Born in Azerbaijan and based in Rotterdam, Netherlands, Figarova brings a remarkably broad range of influences to her works, which may help explain their appeal. You can hear the influence of her classical training in the care she brings to her scoring. Yet the mercurial, unpredictable nature of her musical themes — and the intriguing way she develops them — points to a composer enraptured with the creative possibilities of jazz."

— Howard Reich, *Chicago Tribune*

"Figarova is among the most important composers to come into jazz in the new millennium..."

— Thomas Conrad, *JazzTimes* November 2008

