



Annie Chen Octet *Secret Treetop*

SHANGHAI AUDIO & VIDEO

★★★

New York-based, Beijing-born Annie Chen follows her 2014 debut and her prior experience performing funk, soul and jazz in China with a naturally diverse set, showcasing her unique vocal styles and ability to fluidly blend a wide swath of influence and render it as a cohesive whole.

Trained on classical piano, Chen's scat vocals are her improvisational instrument, a percussive tool and way to communicate beyond language; her understanding of music from the Eastern Hemisphere and the ways it's fused to jazz melody is her unique skill as a singer, composer and leader. Consisting of musicians with connections to cultural traditions from Poland, Japan and North America, her octet brings additional spheres of influence to the global soundscapes.

Leading off with "Ozledim Seni," Chen's brand of scat has a proximity to the a cappella tradition of Balkan choirs. "Orange Tears Lullaby" is as otherworldly as its title suggests, while "Leaving Sonnet" strictly adheres to the rhyming poetry form that inspired it. The title track is an exquisite blend of flute and strings, scat and explosive horns that unfolds into a suite, and pushes toward Brazilian sounds with Alex LoRe's flute at centerstage. And if the strains of "Gan Lan Shu" and "Ao Bao Xiang Hui" sound particularly Eastern to American listeners, they are respectively Taiwanese and Mongolian traditional songs (though the latter's piano lines are born of free-jazz, while the horns are more straightahead). This clear-eyed fusion of East and West with an avant-garde twist is Chen's contribution to contemporary currents of international jazz.

—Denise Sullivan

Secret Treetop: Ozledim Seni; Majo Kiki In 12 Days; Ao Bao Xiang Hui; Secret Treetop; Orange Tears Lullaby; Mr. Wind-Up Bird; Strange Yearning; Leaving Sonnet; Gan Lan Shu; My Ocean Is Blue In White. (S&V)

Personnel: Annie Chen, vocals; Tomoko Omura, violin; Alex LoRe, alto saxophone, flute; David Smith, trumpet, flugelhorn; Rafal Samocki, guitar; Glenn Zaleski, piano; Jerod Lippi, drums; Mathew Muntz, bass.

Ordering info: anniechenjazz.com