

## Jazz's Focus on Ethnicity

Patrick Groenland listens to five recent releases by Tigran Hamasyan, The Unusual History of Ether, Sinikka Langeland, Keith Jarrett and Graham Reynolds.

### **Tigran Hamasyan — A Fable (Emarcy, USA)**

Bringing your ethnicity to the table is pretty flavoursome in jazz at the moment, and we are better off for it too, particularly when the integration seems so genuinely a part of a musician's character – as is the case with Tigran.

A prodigious talent as a soloist, these compositions and arrangements of medieval hymns, poetry and folk songs from his native Armenian exhibit a maturity both in terms of orchestration and solo piano performance, so much so that it's easy to take his brilliant right-hand improvisations for granted.

The beauty of this album (already the recipient of a French Grammy award) is that Tigran's technique and jazz training never feel like they are being served by the composition, quite the opposite in fact. Each piece exudes a different character, from the rhythmic fervor of 'What the Waves Brought' and 'Carnival' to the lush and distinctive Armenian modal harmony of 'Samsara' and simply melodies of 'Longing' (to which Tigran contributes overdubbed vocalisations). There is even space for a jazz standard, 'Someday my Prince Will Come', popularized by Miles Davis, here reharmonised almost beyond recognition as a dark brooding waltz.

The influence of piano greats Chick Corea and Brad Mehldau occasionally peek through, although it's not hard to envisage Tigran himself joining this level of company in years to come.

Be sure to catch him in Dublin on January 24, in the National Concert Hall.

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