

LUCIANA SOUZA "Speaking in Tongues" (Sunnyside) Santa Fe New Mexican

Paul Weideman
January 2016

Jazz is all about "listening and collaboration and dialogue," Luciana Souza says in a video interview about her new album. That methodology proves itself beautifully in her work here with guitarist Lionel Loueke, harmonicist Grégoire Maret, drummer Kendrick Scott, and bassist Massimo Biolcati. On the opener, "At the Fair," Souza's sublime wordless singing is as syncopated as the stepping bass and tat-tat percussion. At Maret's entrance, everything gets funkier; he and Loueke, playing electric guitar, lay it on thick. A stunning finale ties the knot on the band's bright, stimulating mix. Souza and Loueke sing gently together with his acoustic guitar on "Hymn," but the mood changes from melancholic to celebratory in the second half. "Straw Hat," which is enlivened by an African rhythm, has Souza expressing in an invented "language" that actually sounds Portuguese (she is Brazilian), and she adds flourishes of pure jazz scat. Together with fascinating harmonica work and Loueke's outlandish synthesized guitar, they fashion the album's most dynamic track. "For me, singing without words means I can articulate my own humanity with just sounds," Souza says — but on this album she adds two songs composed around Leonard Cohen poems. The first, "Split," sounds like a desolate urban landscape ("and the lover will groan and the other will laugh"), and the poetry is punctuated by stellar guitar and harmonica solos, and more of Souza's scating. This is a remarkable, dynamic album.

LUCIANA
SOUZA
SPEAKING
IN TONGUES

