



VA VIRGINIA SCHENCK VOCAL ARTIST

Vocalist Virginia Schenck has studied and performed music since her childhood, but since 2007, she has renewed her commitment to singing full-time. Using the stage name VA, she has released three albums which showcase her developing artistry. Schenck was raised in Florida and attended Florida State University. While her degree was in Music Therapy, she studied jazz piano, voice and dance. She started singing jazz gigs while in school, and continued to sit in with groups after she launched her music therapy career in Macon, Georgia. Her love of jazz was enriched through a friendship with drummer Jaimoe (previously a member of the Allman Brothers Band). In 2007, she had the opportunity to work with Bobby McFerrin and Rhiannon in New York, and over the next three years, she continued her studies with both musicians. By this time, Schenck joined the local jazz scene in Atlanta and formed the trio that still accompanies her today: pianist Kevin Bales, bassist Rodney Jordan, and drummer Marlon Patton.

Schenck's style moves between straight-ahead swing to daring, progressive improvisation. Schenck says *I like being grounded in tradition, but I want to tantalize my audience and inspire myself by doing something different. But I always come back to center with traditional sounds.* Examples of both elements can be found in abundance throughout VA's albums. On first glance, her debut album looks like a fairly standard vocal record, with a mix of standards, ballads, jazz classics and originals. However, as the album progresses, VA's original concepts become immediately apparent. She places Tom Jobim's "How Insensitive" in a slow-burning Latin groove, sets "Better Than Anything" over a New Orleans street beat and explores the loneliness in Monk's "Round Midnight" with a mournful bass/voice duet. Schenck's versatile delivery allows her to project a wide range of emotions from heart-rending tenderness to powerful intensity, and her impeccable diction allows the listener to understand every word of her compelling stories.

VA's second album, "Interior Notions" includes further explorations into progressive music, leading off with McFerrin's "Say Ladeo" which features Schenck's arresting wordless vocals juxtaposed against the kalimba of Kevin Spears. Her unique arrangement of Irving Berlin's "How Deep is the Ocean" opens with her vocals and Bales' piano floating above the insistent and meter-based patterns of Jordan and Patton. In the second chorus, the group subtly adopts a common tempo and increases the overall intensity. The album's highlight is an extended setting of "Nature Boy", which begins with an atmospheric dialogue between Schenck and Patton before Schenck engages the familiar melody in a free tempo. Later in the track, Schenck improvises a scat solo that is enhanced by Spears' melodic contributions on kalimba, and Patton's strong and propulsive drums. The arrangements for this 15-minute track and the title tune were improvised in the studio, and Schenck associates the creativity of her fellow musicians with the mystic shaman. *Most shamans are musicians, and most musicians are shamans, whether they know it or not,* she says with a laugh.

Schenck's newest album, "Aminata Moseka," celebrates one of her musical heroes, Abbey Lincoln. While VA never heard Lincoln sing in person, she had admired her music for many years and included several of Lincoln's signature pieces on her previous albums. She reprises those arrangements with new performances, and adds several more Lincoln originals to the playlist. Again, Schenck transforms the songs from their traditional styles, adding a backbeat to the ballad "Bird Alone", refocusing "Another World" into a bass/voice dialogue, and—most notably—attaching Maya Angelou's original poem to Lincoln's song "Caged Bird". On "The River", Schenck uses the free improvisation techniques she learned from Rhiannon and McFerrin for a wild mix of poetry and avant-garde jazz. Yet, as in her previous albums and in her live performances, Schenck never leaves the classic jazz



style behind, and “Aminata Moseka” also includes highly accessible readings of Lincoln classics like “Talking to the Sun,” “Blue Monk” and “Wholly Earth”.

Whether she is known by her birth name or as VA, Virginia Schenck is an imaginative vocalist with a broad stylistic reach. She can soothe her audience with a beautiful ballad, invigorate them with a re-imagined standard and challenge them with a powerful blast of free improvisation. Yet all of these aspects exist within one singular and unique voice. Hers is certainly a talent worthy of greater recognition.

Recordings:

Aminata Moseka – an Abbey Lincoln Tribute (2017)

Interior Notions (Airborne Ecstasy, 2015)

VA (Airborne Ecstasy, 2012)

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