



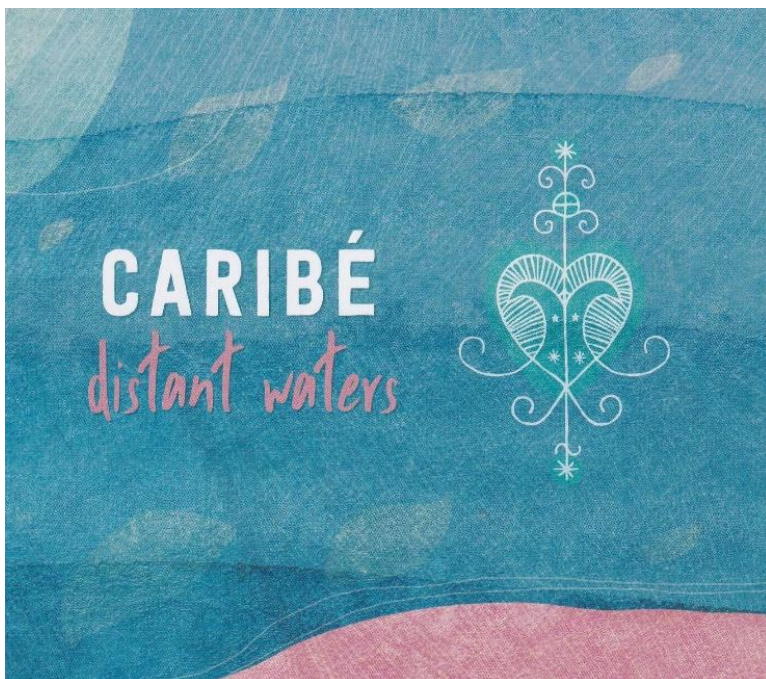
CARIBÉ: DISTANT WATERS

Album review by Eric Myers

Label: Independent

Personnel: Matt Collins (trumpet & flugelhorn), Gai Bryant (soprano & alto saxophones), Julian Gough (tenor saxophone), James Greening (trombone, tracks 1,4,6 & 8), Nick Barnard (trombone, tracks 2,3,5 & 7), Daniel Pliner (piano), Max Alduca (electric & double bass), Stave Marin (drum set & congas), Kent Windress (bata drums), Adrian Medina (vocals (tracks 2 & 5))

[This review appeared in the magazine of the Australian Jazz Museum AJAZZ 98, published in August, 2023, page 19]



My enthusiasm for Gai Bryant's Afro-Cuban jazz projects has been documented previously, in reviews published in *The Australian* and on my Australian jazz history website. Her 18-piece big band Palacio de la Rumba has been going for over a decade while her sextet ALLY, playing Peruvian/Brazilian jazz, made its debut album in 2022. Now for Caribé, a nine-piece band which melds musicians and dancers from Sydney's Cuban, jazz and Latin communities.

This group was formed by Bryant and the Sydney-based Cuban dancer Adrian Medina in 2017 to perform in Sydney's Afro-Latino Festival. *Distant Waters* is their debut album, and the personnel are listed above. Some of the musicians are not household names, but their playing is exceedingly impressive on this fine album, suggesting that Bryant is able to tap into an unprecedented surfeit of well-educated and experienced jazz musicians in Sydney, who not only excel as section players, but also produce the sort of convincing improvisations essential to first-class jazz performance.



Saxophonist/composer Gai Bryant... PHOTO CREDIT ARWYN BRYANT

Distant Waters includes eight Bryant original compositions/arrangements, which reflect her jazz consciousness as much as they reflect their inspiration, derived from classic Latin time-feels. In this music I detect a purity of spirit, courtesy of the seriousness of jazz as a genre. As a jazz musician Bryant goes for substance; her music is never flashy for the sake of it. Without that jazz consciousness I suspect the music might tip over into vacuity.

Also, high energy and excitement in this sort of Latin music are of course inevitable but, at the same time I also prefer that sort of excitement to be offset by contemplative and ruminative sections. Accordingly Gai Bryant's thoughtful soprano saxophone solos are always particularly welcome.

I would say something similar about the beautiful title track *Distant Waters*, written as a tribute to the well-known Brazilian-born artist and cultural activist Marily Cintra. It includes solos from pianist Pliner, bassist Alduca and Bryant herself on soprano and is a model of sensitive dynamics, demonstrating the sort of characteristic restraint in the playing, which gives the piece, and the album for that matter, real distinction.



Brazilian-born artist and cultural activist Marily Cintra: the beautiful title track “Distant Waters” has been written for her...PHOTO COURTESY CANBERRA CITY NEWS



Pianist Daniel Pliner (above), trombonist James Greening (below) and Gai Bryant herself: their individuality goes a long way towards the evolution of what one can increasingly call Bryant's oeuvre...



I reiterate my admiration for the pianist Daniel Pliner whose contributions here are always packed with interest. Pliner, trombonist James Greening and Bryant herself are the three key musicians who are common to Gai Bryant's three Afro-Cuban groups. Have a listen to the album's opening track *Mozambique Muckle* where all three solo. After a splendid improvisation from Bryant on alto saxophone, note how Greening paces himself in his solo and takes the music unerringly into high energy. The individuality of these three musicians goes a long way towards the evolution of what one can increasingly call Bryant's oeuvre, an oeuvre which I believe now has a unique character.

Other articles on this website which may be of interest:

Eric Myers, "Gai Bryant's Palacio de la Rumba", The York Club, December 2, 2021 at this link <https://ericmyersjazz.com/miscellaneous-postings-8>

Eric Myers, review of ALLY album "Drum Junk", The Weekend Australian, October 15, 2022 at this link <https://ericmyersjazz.com/cd-reviews-page-60>