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By Thomas Staudter

Andromeda Turre debuts album with climate focus at KMA



Katonah resident Andromeda Turre is releasing her second album, "From the Earth," with a performance at the Katonah Museum of Art. Photo credit: MA2LA

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To jazz vocalist-composer Andromeda Turre, the irony is sad and disturbing. Just as she is set to release her new album, “From the Earth” — a collection of original compositions embedded with short, poignant interviews, which calls for a defense of our planet’s fragile biospheres in the face of our ongoing climate crisis — much of the country is experiencing the hottest start to summer on record.

“The album could not be timelier,” said Turre, while sipping an iced tea at Mimi’s Coffee House. “But that always has been one of the purposes of jazz — to reflect the time we are living in and what we are experiencing. I’m just following in that tradition. ‘From the Earth’ is very much a time capsule, rooted in this idea of jazz as oral history.”

Turre (pronounced ter-ray) performed the music in “From the Earth” in concert on Saturday, July 27, a day after the album’s official release, in the Marilyn M. Simpson Sculpture Garden at the Katonah Museum of Art.

Joining Turre on the bandstand were several instrumentalists who perform on the album, including Chien Chien Lu, a vibraphone and marimba player acclaimed as one of the jazz world’s bright new talents; bassist Riche Goods; and saxophonist Chelsea Baratz. Rounding out the group was pianist Fima Chupakhin, keyboardist Elisha Henis Miklosh on synthesizer and drummer Shirazette Tinnin.

Turre recently spoke about her new album and KMA concert—a hometown show! —at the coffee house in Mount Kisco, where she resided for three years before moving to Katonah in 2020. She and her husband, Lars Klein, who works in the budding AI field, moved up from New York City to enjoy a quieter life and raise their school-age daughter and son.

The music and lyrics on her new album, Turre explained, originated during a trip to Iceland for a friend’s wedding two years ago. Given an opportunity to tour one of the country’s many glacier fields, she was actually inside a glacier when she experienced a powerful and immense emotion. “I am a very sensitive and spiritual person, and what I felt was the glacier’s sadness — I could feel it crying, as it melted,” said Turre. Staggered by this event, she recounted going back to her hotel with words and music about what she’d experienced already in her head, ready to be written down. The result was “Cryosphere,” a song about extinction from the perspective of the glacier, delivered in a jazzy pop arrangement guided by pianist ELEW (Eric Lewis). Neither a dramatic song or a grand gesture, the disappearing glacier’s story simply unfolds, its life form not expecting much notice or compassion from the rest of the world.

Turre kept writing, eventually conceiving a jazz suite of four parts. The first part, from which is taken the album’s title, begins with a recited by poem, “Ingression Interlude,” from African-American poet and lyricist Betty H. Neals, who is Turre’s godmother. It asks the listener to “lean on nature to teach you the way” against a backdrop of a droning didgeridoo and haunting sounds Turre makes with a crystal singing bowl. Mood and intentions set, the following sections — “From the Sky,” “Sea” and “Ice” — intersperse music with other spoken word parts, taken from interviews Turre made with holistic health pioneer Dr. Jifunza Wright-Carter, climate experts, and sustainable community leaders from around the world.

But it's the music that sparkles first and foremost. Turre, a professional musician for more than 20 years, is a commanding vocalist, her expressive artistry front and center throughout "From the Earth."

Her winning musical arrangements show remarkable confidence in all the different musical styles featured on the album — strong, hard-swinging post-bop, danceable Latin jazz, mid-tempo balladry, and even hyperkinetic, jazz fusion with a hip-hop sensibility. And considering it is only the second album Turre has released so far — a debut CD titled "Introducing" comprised of standards and two original compositions came out in 2008 — the entirety is almost too surprising to comprehend.

Some credit belongs to Grammy-winning producer-artist Scott Jacoby (also a Northern Westchester resident), who oversaw the recording of "From the Earth" in the studio. Instrumentalists on the album, especially Lu, ELEW and drummer Gene Lake (Turre's godfather), provide spirited performances, too. In a sense, though, Turre has been waiting her entire life for a big, career-illuminating project —and here it is.

Born in New York City, Turre grew up in Montclair, New Jersey, the daughter of two renowned jazz artists — cellist Akua Dixon and trombonist Steve Turre. (Both perform on the new album: Steve Turre's conch shell solo is featured on the song "Hydrosphere," while his trombone gets a workout on "Contigo.") Young Andromeda studied piano and sang in school and community choirs while absorbing a tremendous amount of jazz, some of it first-hand from legends and family friends like Dizzy Gillespie and Max Roach.

An undeniable independent streak manifested itself when Turre left her vocal studies at the Berklee College of Music to tour with Ray Charles, working as the last backing vocalist he hired before retiring from the stage. She later worked at Tokyo Disney and fronted bands, working "six nights a week, three sets a night," she said, in hotels and nightclubs all around the world for a decade as she honed her craft before returning to the U.S. in 2012.

Today, Turre has her own event production company, and she hosts the "Growing Up Jazz" show two days a week on Sirius XM's Real Jazz channel. Last month, she was the featured vocalist in Twyla Tharp's multidisciplinary revue, "How Long Blues," during its 23-day run at Little Island in Manhattan, working with T Bone Burnett and David Mansfield.

An active member of her community, Turre also works as a diversity and inclusion consultant. Indeed, her mindfulness and creative life are intertwined. During our conversation she noted that one of her big artistic inspirations over the years was the landmark 1962 album by Max Roach, "It's Time," a grand statement featuring vocals by Abbey Lincoln in support of civil rights. With this in mind, it's easy to see "From the Earth" as Turre's grand statement: it's time to fight the climate crisis and injustice before it's too late.