

Alexandra Stréliski – Inscape (2018)

Written by bluesever

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1 *Plus tôt* 2 *The quiet voice* 3 *Par la fenêtre de Théo* 4 *Ellipse* 5 *Changing winds*
6 *Interlude* 7 *Blind vision* 8 *Burnout fugue* 9 *Overtun* 10 *Revient le jour* 11 *Le nouveau départ*

There's always been a cinematic quality to Alexandra Stréliski's music, honed from years working in advertising as a composer. In the eight years since quietly self-releasing debut album *Pianoscope*, slowly the world started taking notice, until director Jean-Marc Vallée placed songs from the record in his works, including *Dallas Buyers Club*, *Demolition* and the trailer of *Big Little Lies*. Now, Stréliski has left advertising to pursue music full-time, and *Inscape* marks the launch pad with which she'll do so.

Where *Pianoscope* looked outward with its rich, sprightly piano tracks, *Inscape* turns its gaze inward, swapping the sprightliness for a touches of melancholy and yearning. The album title is a portmanteau of "interior" and "landscape," but its similarity to "escape" shouldn't go unnoticed — each track carries a delicate wistfulness, a hopeful glance out a rainy window toward a brighter future.

That Stréliski is so capable of evoking such emotional complexity out of a single instrument heralds much to come as she continues to approach the height of her compositional powers — faint traces of synthesizer on "Interlude" only serve to heighten expectations.

Standing tall among recent solo piano records by fellow Canadian composers Chilly Gonzales and Jean-Michel Blais, *Inscape* is a powerful look toward a new neoclassical landscape. ---Matt Bobkin, exclaim.ca

Contemporary composers and pianists have been able to carve out a lovely niche online over the last few years where online communities can discover underground artists and pull them to the fore. Alexandra Stréliski is a Montreal based composer and her work has started to find its way into TV shows. As people now start to hear her music in more mainstream areas perhaps without knowing her name, now is a perfect time to discover her new album Inscape which showcases her many talents. Alexandra Stréliski

Opening with the absolutely gorgeous “Plus tot”, Alexandra immediately places her composition style somewhere between melodically melancholy but with a positive hue. The inner works of the piano can be heard from the hammer hits to the pedal noises and they underscore the piano notes themselves. The production on the whole album has a vintage warmth to it and on songs like “Par la fenetre de Theo” the sound has that intimate close up warmth that you can imagine yourself in a winter log cabin and can hear the log fire in your mind in the background.

Alexandra’s style is also full of music without ever being bombastic about it. It’s not sparse and it doesn’t keep you waiting – it feels vintage, gentle and refined. When space is used though, in tracks like “Ellipse” there’s a really subtle and crafty sound manipulation that lets the reverb of the notes bleed out in an organic and spacious way that really emphasises the emotional punches of having the pauses and echoes between notes. The first half of the album closes out with the achingly lovely “Changing Winds”.

The second half of the album sees Alexandra Stréliski start to branch out from her formula into new twists. “Interlude” is anything but one and includes some very minimal percussion and synth work behind the optimistic piano that feels like its reaching for something just beyond the notes it can hit. Its lightness in its piano and the depth in its pace creates a wonderful payoff against itself. “Blind Vision” turns away from the vintage beauty for a more mysterious sound. The reverb bleed adds a great amount of atmosphere here by being so subtle – again Alexandra knows that restraint is best here. “Burnout Fugue” is as close to drama as the album gets with its waves of rolling piano chords and melodies that build up. I love that the track has a real tension to it throughout and has a maddening beauty to it. “Overturn” calms you back down with a faint pitter-patter of notes that scamper around like afterthoughts in the mind before “Revient le jour” closes out the usual tracks in a return to that modest, traditional, very central European approach. There is one more track and it is the five-minute “Materials” and its unlike anything else on the album. It’s a dark minimalist electronica track with vocoder vocals, whistling synths and a grizzly dank beat. I really like the track and the uncertain mood it brings to the table but I view it as a bonus track as it feels utterly unrelated to the album itself. I’d be very intrigued as to what Stréliski would do for an entirely creepy electronica release as a result

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of this single track though.

Inscape is a beautiful collection of compositions that feel contemporary vintage. You'll feel the longing and sense of belonging that the pieces bring and Alexandra Stréliski clearly has a wide range of talents to bring to the table. This one is a must-have for piano lovers. ---Simon Smith, higherplainmusic.com

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