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September Suite

Amina Figarova | Munich Records

By [John Kelman](#)

An unfortunate byproduct of today's music industry is that artists are often restricted in how frequently they can release new albums. Sometimes it's a matter of logistics--ECM, despite its prominence, operates with a surprisingly small staff. The direct involvement of label owner Manfred Eicher on virtually every record inherently limits the number of releases each year. Typically, however, it's the result of marketing folks who don't want to place artists in competition with themselves.

In the 1960s multiple releases by a single artist in the same year were not uncommon. Miles Davis, Wayne Shorter, and Bobby Hutcherson documented rapid evolution in a way that is simply impossible today. In the case of Azerbaijan-born/Netherlands-resident pianist/composer Amina Figarova, releasing two albums in one year is not so much about evolution as it is taking a wealth of material from a four-day recording session in November, 2004 and putting it out in two logically distinct packages.

[Come Escape With Me](#), released earlier this year, was essentially a straightforward swinging session, with her crack Dutch septet demonstrating a solid grounding in the American tradition--despite Figarova's refined use of structural foundations referencing her classical background. By contrast, *September Suite* is a more ambitious record, seamlessly integrating abstraction and impressionism with a still-unequivocal allegiance to the American aesthetic.

Inspired by the tragic events of September 11, 2001, Figarova calls *September Suite* an "Ode to Mourning," striving to articulate the various stages of grief in musical terms. Reduced to a sextet--the same players as on *Come Escape With Me*, with the exception of trumpeter Nico Schepers--Figarova uses a slow ostinato and harmonic ambiguity to evoke the deadened feeling of "Numb." On her extended solo she builds layers of abstraction, while bassist Wiro Mahieu uses lazy glissandi to stretch the time, making it feel less rigid.

"Emptyness" relies on liberal use of space and a saxophone/trumpet/flute theme that delicately hovers over an even more languid rhythm section. "Denial" is more acute--a frenzied swinger with shifting meters that features sharp punctuations from the front line before heading into short but cogent solos by saxophonist Kurt van Herck, Schepers, and Figarova. "Rage" revolves around a disjointed rhythmic foundation with even sharper punctuations. Van Heck's solo, suitably extreme, leads into the inevitable emotional drain of the coda.

That Figarova and her group should remain relatively unknown on American soil is curious. In addition to van Herck and Schepers, flautist Bart Platteau is an especially vivid soloist--one of the most vibrant flute players since Joe Farrell played with Chick Corea in the 1970s. Figarova



Track Listing: Numb; Emptyness; Denial; Phot Album; Rage; Trying to Focus; When the Lights Go Down; Dawn; For Laura; Numb (bonus track).

Personnel: Amina Figarova: piano; Bart Platteau: flute, Bb-flute, alto flute, bass flute; Nico Schepers: trumpet, flugelhorn; Kurt Van Herck: tenor saxophone; Wiro Mahieu: acoustic bass; Chris Strik: drums.

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demonstrates an even broader style than on *Come Escape With Me*. Traces of Tyner and Hancock are evident in the way she phrases, but so too are the denser voicings and delicate touch of John Taylor.

As strong as *Come Escape With Me* is, *September Suite* may be even more powerful. Taken collectively, the two recordings provide a comprehensive view of Figarova, whose true strengths as a player and composer are only beginning to be emerge.

Note: *September Suite* is being distributed in North America by [215 Music](#).

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