



**RENEE ROSNES**  
*Written in the Rocks*

Renee Rosnes, piano; Steve Wilson, flute, soprano & alto saxophones; Steve Nelson, vibraphone; Peter Washington, bass; Bill Stewart, drums  
Smoke Sessions SSR-1601 (CD). 2016. Paul Stache, prod.; Chris Allen, eng. DDD? TT: 57:02

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★

**SONICS** ★★★★★

Pianist Renee Rosnes sets out with an ambitious premise on *Written in the Rocks*. The main focus is a seven-movement suite inspired by “the geological record of history buried deep below the earth’s crust,” to quote David Hajdu’s liner notes. There’s a difficult, superbly executed balance between heavily orchestrated themes and a looser, more open feel that makes the album still feel very jazz-rooted. This is fortunate, given the caliber of players on the date, not least of all the powerhouse rhythm team of bassist Peter Washington and drummer Bill Stewart, who have an unrelenting swing hookup and the finest grasp of the music’s many subtleties.

This album also says much about the evolution of Smoke Sessions Records. Closely associated with the jazz club Smoke, in uptown Manhattan, the label has increasingly found its own identity as a platform for top-tier studio recordings. The sound of *Written in the Rocks*, particularly the enveloping blend of Rosnes’s piano with the vibraphone of Steve Nelson, is something to treasure. Steve Wilson, appearing in six of the nine tracks, is captured beautifully on soprano and alto saxophones, though his flute in “The KT Boundary,” brings a whole other dimension of warmth and ethereality to the work.

Two loosely related non-suite pieces close out the record: “From Here to a Star,” a crafty variation on Irving Berlin’s “How Deep Is the Ocean” (minus Wilson); and “Goodbye Mumbai,” a hiccupy mid-tempo number with Wilson on alto, perfectly embodying the band’s immaculate feel and palpable conviction.—David R. Adler



**SARAH VAUGHAN**  
*Live at Rosy's*

Resonance HCD-2017 (2 CDs). 2016. Zev Feldman, Timothy Owens, prods.; Fran Gala, George Klabin, mix, restoration. AAD? TT: 87:03

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★

**SONICS** ★★★★★

If you’re only a casual follower of Sarah Vaughan’s, this recording could turn you into a fanatic. Quite arguably one of the top three female jazz singers ever, Vaughan was somewhat mismanaged in a career caught between the big-band and pop eras of jazz. Her voice was a technical marvel, with operatic range, deep gospel fervor, and an absolutely fearless improvisational genius. Her studio recordings included many pop

hits that used some but not all of her skills—it’s on the live albums, such as the classic *Live in Japan* (1973), that we hear her elastic talent in its full glory.

Vaughan had an unerring sense of how to relate to an audience and bring its listeners inside her music. These tapes, from a May 31, 1978, concert at Rosy’s Jazz Club, in New Orleans, originally recorded for broadcast on National Public Radio’s *Jazz Alive!* series, is now available in near-complete form. Vaughan is totally relaxed in dealing with this jazz-loving Deep South audience: when someone in the crowd asks for Ella Fitzgerald’s signature tune “A-Tisket A-Tasket,” Vaughan says, “Well, I’ll be damned, [he] thinks I’m Lena Horne,” then launches impromptu into one verse of the song. Her accompanists—pianist Carl Schroeder, bassist Walter Booker, drummer Jimmy Cobb—stay with her every step of the way, through “I’ll Remember April” at breakneck speed, an astonishingly virtuoso deconstruction of “Fascinating Rhythm,” and anguished, heartbreaking readings of the show-stopping ballads “Everything Must Change,” “My Funny Valentine,” and “Send in the Clowns.”—John Swenson

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*Stereophile*,  
Analog Corner, May 2016

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