

Before Today, Beyond Tomorrow

By

Ann Sweeten

Written by

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There can be nothing more harrowing than a journey through Cancer and **Ann Sweeten** is doing this for the third time, but sometimes from that darkness can come great clarity, great wisdom and a true appreciation of the very fabric of life itself, perhaps even a oneness of spirit. On **Before Today, Beyond Tomorrow**, Ann performs with her heart on her sleeve and bares her musical soul, in an effort to allow us to perhaps see the things that we take granted in a different light, perhaps with a little more humility and gratitude along the way.

The opening offering is called **Across The Midnight Sky**, I personally found something quite hopeful and reflective in this one, in the way that one does whilst looking at a fading sunset in the hope of a better day tomorrow. The delicate nature of the performance by Sweeten on the piano is something to enjoy, she is partnered by a soft and calming English horn, courtesy of *Nancy Rumbel*.

The title track is up next and entitled of course **Before Today, Beyond Tomorrow**. Sweeten is at her most creative on this arrangement, one that is quite ambient in parts, but also melodic too. Sweeten is joined by *Nancy Rumbel* on English horn and *Eugene Friesen* on Cello. This is tapestry of musical thought and projection, created out of memories of the past, the reality of the present and hopes of a future yet to unfurl itself. The string section on this offering are truly beautiful, and the charm with which Sweeten plays is a real treat to listen to.

Beyond The Clouds is a sublime moment of ambience that I could easily sit and listen to for hours; I gaze up right now into the blueness of a summer's day and

watch the fragments of a few errant clouds drift past my window. Sweetens performance here is divine in creating a mood of blissful acceptance, perhaps a realisation that we are part of something much greater than we can perceive. The composition is beautifully played and with such a high level of sensitivity it has to be applauded.

The Empty Swing had a depth of sadness about its structure that was so profound and moving, Sweetens performance here was deeply moving and with the assistance of the master violinist *Charlie Bisharat* and the English Horn of *Nancy Rumbel*, we have an arrangement that manifested a moving opus of emptiness, in some way the swing could be telling the story of a past, some redolent memories of times gone and then, emptiness.

I have felt strong emotions during this review and those were enhanced further through this next composition called **Saying Goodbye**. The emotive nature of this took me back to 2012, the time when I had to say farewell to my first wife after her 5 year Cancer journey and after 34 years of marriage, which was the hardest thing to do. Here Sweetens song of goodbyes has a sense of healing within it that I find somewhat appealing and the multi-instrumental nature of the track is utterly embracing in all ways.

The coldness of this next piece is explained in the scientific nature of the composition being that it is the chromosome that is responsible for Ann's latest Cancer journey, this is a hard piece to listen to, it is deeply mournful and will move you to tears. Sweetens piano is steely, as if depicting the unfeeling nature of the beast, then a juxtaposition of performance can be found with the string, horn and cello sections, they create from the darkness of the pit, the very emotional state of the performance, in the piece we now know as **Philadelphia 22**.

The most intriguing composition for me was this one, called **Vanish**. This could of course apply to anything we are losing or have lost, for me it comes at a time when I have pledged my alliance to all things green on the planet and saw a documentary the other day about the destruction of our polar caps. I can hear within this piece the opportunity of creating a composition of great power and sadness for this frightening occurrence, the multi instrumental nature of this arrangement is wonderfully cinematic, and Sweetens performance is among the best she has in my opinion, ever done.

I found this another difficult one to write about, **Lullaby for Blackie Boo**. I have two dogs, one of them I chose, and when the time comes to lose them it will hurt very badly indeed, but one must find solace in the great times had whilst alive. This is what this song does for me, written about the passing of one of Ann's dogs, it gives me a reflective pleasure from all the laughs and fun we had, and I'm getting emotional now, so that must show you just what an excellent piece of emotive music this composition actually is.

Through Winter Panes is another ecological masterpiece and one that is of course close to my heart, being the nature boy that I am. The colourful energy of Sweetens wonderfully fluent performance is sublime; we're also treated to a little more *Soprano Saxophone* from *Premik Russell Tubbs*, which adds just another wonderful dimension of classy music to this already charming arrangement.

Quite breathlessly we have found our way to the very edge of the album and we come to our last piece, this parting gift from the artist is called **Like Smoke Through A Keyhole**. A more gentle way to leave the album you will not find, we're even gifted a sensitive performance on flute by *Trisha Craig* as well. Sweeten closes down this album with a picture perfect parting gift and then the music disappears into the ether, perhaps like smoke through a keyhole, gone, but never forgotten.

With a team of consummate professionals behind her, **Ann Sweeten** has pulled off a masterstroke of an album, one that will stir your emotions, that will leave you deeply moved, that will inspire you as well perhaps, but hopefully one that will leave you, in total gratitude of this most precious of things that we are blessed with, life.

Before Today, Beyond Tomorrow in my view is Sweetens best work so far, it challenged me to give myself to the moment and the music and at the end I had found an element of healing within its tones. This is an album created by an artist who clearly is in touch with her musical muse, the performances within are pristine, beautiful and emotive, and is an album that if you wish to add something of total quality to your collections, you simply must have at all costs.