

Pianist/Composer Renee Rosnes Returns with Long-Awaited New Album, *Written in the Rocks*

Available February 5 via Smoke Sessions Records

Poet William Blake famously wrote of seeing the "world in a grain of sand." Pianist/composer **Renee Rosnes** takes a similarly intimate look at the wondrous sweep of the natural world on her new Smoke Sessions release, *Written in the Rocks*. Due out February 5, 2016, the album is built around an ambitious new suite inspired by the evolution of life on Earth, captured with a sense of awe and majesty.

A sense of discovery lies at the core of "The Galapagos Suite," which makes up the bulk of the recording and is named for the island chain that inspired Darwin's theory of evolution. From the origins of life in the ocean billions of years ago through the unearthing of the human ancestor known as "Lucy" to the recent discovery of Tiktaalik, one of the earliest animals to venture out of the sea and onto the land, the progress of evolution and our own ever-evolving understanding of it, serves to inspire Rosnes' compositional mind.

Discovery is also a key element of the music created by Rosnes and her bandmates. Saxophonist and flutist **Steve Wilson**, vibraphonist **Steve Nelson**, bassist **Peter Washington** and drummer **Bill Stewart** excavate the riches and mysteries from the pianist's gorgeous, densely layered compositions. "All of us have personal and musical relationships that have been growing for decades," Rosnes says. "As a band, we've developed a focused sound with a wide and nuanced palette of colors and rhythms. We play off of each other."

These colors prove ideal to paint the musical landscapes that Rosnes' writing evokes, spanning billions of years and monumental shifts in biological history. Her love of nature comes from far more personal origins, however: her childhood in the Pacific Northwest of Canada. "I've always felt inspired by nature," she explains.

"The infinite blue-green hues of coastal British Columbia are in my blood. My family's home sat at the bottom of a street that opened up into a deep ravine, and a half hour's drive from there, the city lights were dim enough to offer an astonishing view of the night sky," the pianist reminisces. "Salty air, the smell of seaweed, the relentless pounding of waves, and the agreeable aroma of cedar - all of these provide me with spiritual nourishment and inspiration. To compose music about our planet's evolution was a stimulating concept and one brimming with possibilities."

The album begins with "The KT Boundary," a prologue for the mass extinction of the dinosaurs and most other life on the planet at the time. Rosnes' slowly-dawning piece focuses not on the cataclysm, but on the blossoming of new life in its wake. The instrumental layers reflect the layers of rock that reveal our geologic history. The joyous dance of Wilson's flute, Nelson's vibes and Rosnes' piano then evoke Darwin's "Galapagos," written, the composer says, to reflect the famed naturalist's "anticipation of exploration and sense of purpose of his journey."

Building at the outset from a single note to a complex chord, "So Simple A Beginning" depicts the origins of life, with Stewart's rippling, floating brushwork providing the backdrop for this shimmering ballad. The quarter-note motifs played by Rosnes and Washington on "Lucy From Afar" represent the first tentative footsteps of the 3-foot-tall Ethiopian Australopithecus, one of our first known ancestors to walk on two legs. The title track follows, with a searching intro duet by Rosnes and Nelson that captures the wonder to be found "Written In The Rocks" of tectonic plates, fossils, volcanic rock, cave paintings and even the Rosetta Stone, through which, Rosnes points out, "we continue to learn about our species and the planet."

Tracing Tiktaalik's path from sea to land, "Deep in the Blue" represents those two worlds through a pair of interwoven melodies. "Cambrian Explosion" concludes the suite by sonically describing the sudden burst of life that gave rise to most of the species alive today. As Rosnes describes the piece, "I musically characterized the event with a spiky, atonal line that gains momentum. The focus bounces from one instrument to another, ending in a collective improvisation."

The album closes with two more Rosnes originals unrelated to the suite, though the second was inspired by a discovery no less incredible, if far more personal. "From Here To A Star" looks up from the Earth to the heavens, with a stargazing melody built on the harmony of Irving Berlin's "How Deep Is The Ocean." Finally, "Goodbye Mumbai" recalls Rosnes' first visit to India in 2013, after discovering back in 1994, that her biological mother was of Punjabi heritage.

In discussing her inspiration for this important and rewarding set of music, Rosnes quotes Picasso: "The artist is a receptacle for emotions that come from all over the place: from the sky, from the earth, from a scrap of paper, from a passing shape, from a spider's web." On ***Written in the Rocks***, those emotions pour forth from the natural world to resonant and lushly detailed compositions realized through expressive, vital playing by a profoundly connected quintet. And it only took a few short billion years to get here.

"Written in the Rocks" was recorded live in New York at Sear Sound's Studio C on a Sear-Avalon custom console at 96KHz/24bit and mixed to 1/2" analog tape using a Studer mastering deck. Available in audiophile HD format.

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