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## Iiro Rantala *My Finnish Calendar*

ACT 9882

★★★★½

Ever wonder what a year-in-the-life of a Finn's like? Or, even better, what it might sound like? Iiro Rantala's transportive song cycle, *My Finnish Calendar*, delivers 12 solo-piano performances depicting the nation's conventional activities and emotional tenor that trace the course of each year.

Similar in character to Ben Wendel's splendid *The Seasons*, each piece here is named after a month of the year, the album beginning with the stormy "January," where Rantala's stately lament evokes the spirit of regret after the preceding month's indulgences. But the mood brightens quickly on "February," as the keyboardist unravels a jaunty, percussive melody that shifts into modern stride pianism, while the lovely mid-tempo ballad "March" locates an emotional state somewhere between the ennui of winter and the anticipation of spring. Those three compositions alone illustrate Rantala's virtuosic prowess as an improviser capable of enormous idiomatic and emotional range.

Granted, one can find similar concept works that date back even to Antonio Vivaldi's iconic four-part violin concerti, *The Four Seasons*. But for a modern, personalized update with both emotional magnetism and musical intelligence, *My Finnish Calendar* is a welcome entry to the universal musical-almanac theme.

—John Murph

**My Finnish Calendar:** January; February; March; April; May; June; July; August; September; October; November; December. (53:21)

**Personnel:** Iiro Rantala, piano.

**Ordering info:** [actmusic.com](http://actmusic.com)



## Anna Maurer Trio *Visionariness*

ATS 0934

★★★★½

Christian Sands once said that the piano, bass and drums are the engine of any band. Anna Maurer must have been listening, as the high-octane sports car she's assembled—the bandleader on keys, Thomas Malcher on bass and Martin Kleibi on drums—delivers some memorable music that will keep your head nodding, your feet tapping and your shoulders rising Whitney Houston-esque.

From the opening "Expectation" to the closing "Being Norbet," the album moves from hard groove to hip-hop to atonal sounds, as on "Skrjabin," a nod to Russian composer and pianist Alexander Skrjabin, who was known for his unusual harmonies. But the surprise here is "Smile," featuring Austrian-born MC Yasmin Hafedh. The timbre of *Visionariness* doesn't prepare listeners for the tune, but true to its title, Hafedh's rapping in German and English inverts frowns.

Although the title tune pales in comparison to the rest of what's here, the album still should catch the attention of any jazz fan, regardless of where they fall on the musical spectrum. The point that Maurer's album makes is that she can compose some memorable tunes, put together a trio to execute her vision—and hit it.

—Michele L. Simms-Burton



**Visionariness:** Expectation; Skrjabin; After All; Smile; Virtual Real; Once In A While; Visionariness; Being Norbet. (53:48)

**Personnel:** Anna Maurer, keyboards; Thomas Malcher, electric bass, bass; Martin Kleibi, drums; Yasmin Hafedh (4), vocals; Simon Plötzeneder (4), trumpet; Christian Maurer (8), tenor saxophone.

**Ordering info:** [ats-records.com](http://ats-records.com)

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## DESIGN



**NICK VILLALOBOS**

Instrument: NS CR5M Bass

Trio: SIMPLY THREE

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Photo: Leonelli Wells

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