



MELISSA ALDANA

BIOGRAPHY

GRAMMY-nominated saxophonist and composer Melissa Aldana has garnered international recognition for her visionary work as a band leader, as well as her deeply meditative interpretation of language and vocabulary. She was recently signed with Blue Note Records and releases her debut album with the historic label titled *12 Stars* in March 2022. “Melissa Aldana is one of the foremost musician/composers of her generation,” says Blue Note President Don Was.

Aldana was one of the founding members of ARTEMIS, the all-star collective that released their debut album *ARTEMIS* on Blue Note this past Fall. The album featured Aldana’s simmering composition “Frida,” which was dedicated to Mexican painter Frida Kahlo, who inspired the musician through “her own process of finding self-identity through art.”

Kahlo was also the subject of Aldana’s celebrated 2019 album *Visions (Motéma)*, which earned the saxophonist her first-ever GRAMMY nomination for Best Improvised Jazz Solo, an acknowledgement of her impressive tenor solo on her composition “Elsewhere.” In naming *Visions* among the best albums of 2019 for NPR Music, critic Nate Chinen wrote that Aldana “has the elusive ability to balance technical achievement against a rich emotional palette.”

Aldana was born in Santiago, Chile and grew up in a musical family. Both her father and grandfather were saxophonists and she took up the instrument at age six under her father Marcos’ tutelage. Aldana began on alto, influenced by artists such as Charlie Parker and Cannonball Adderley, but switched to tenor upon first hearing the music of Sonny Rollins. She performed in Santiago jazz clubs in her early teens and was invited by pianist Danilo Pérez to play at the Panama Jazz Festival in 2005.

Aldana moved to the U.S. to attend the Berklee College of Music, and the year after graduating she released her first album *Free Fall* on Greg Osby’s Inner Circle label in 2010, followed by *Second Cycle* in 2012. In 2013, at 24, she became the first female instrumentalist and the first South American musician to win the Thelonious Monk International Jazz Saxophone Competition, in which her father had been a semi-finalist in 1991. After her win, she released her third album *Melissa Aldana & Crash Trio (Concord)*. Aldana is also an in-demand clinician and educator, and the New England Conservatory’s Jazz Studies Department recently appointed her to their jazz faculty beginning in the Fall of 2021.