



ALA.NI
SUNSHINE MUSIC

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When ALA.NI began writing *Sunshine Music*, her third album, the Paris winter of 2023 was in full, freezing force. Composing beneath layers of duvets in her apartment in Opéra, she drew warmth not from her surroundings, but from memories of the Caribbean sun she had recently left behind.

What was supposed to be a two-week trip in December 2020 turned into two and a half years across Barbados, Grenada — where her parents had grown up — and then Jamaica — an extended sojourn that offered a new sense of self. "Living in Jamaica was the first time I had lived in a Black-majority country," she says. "Jamaicans are very unapologetically themselves. I've chosen to live in Paris, and I feel more myself and more expressive and more comfortable here than I did in London, and more appreciated and valued as an artist too. But there are microaggressions and microracisms that we have to live with every single day as People of Colour. When I moved out of that environment, I was like, 'Shit, that's what I've been dealing with all this time.' I was just getting on and accepting certain negative behaviours as an act of mental survival."

In Jamaica, music flowed naturally. She collaborated with Sly Dunbar, one of the island's legendary drummers, coaxing him out of near-retirement for an impromptu session. Life there — its rawness, its unfiltered expression — seeped into her bones and eventually into the songs she would later write, huddled against the Parisian cold.

Sunshine Music hums with the memory of that heat: a tapestry of influences stitched from calypso, jazz, bossa nova, and the great postwar songbook, threaded together by ALA.NI's singular voice and sensibility. Across the album, familiar styles are honored without pastiche: the languid pull of reggae, the whisper of a bossa nova rhythm, the clipped phrasing of musical theatre. On *This Is Why*, she channels the warmth of a December romance into bossa-inflected sensuality, while *Something You Said* captures the rush of an unexpected connection through close, shimmering harmonies. Elsewhere, *Hey Moon* offers a late-night lullaby intimacy, built around dampened jazz chords and whispered vocals.

But what truly binds the record is its emotional core — a quiet resilience and a lingering warmth born of both memory and defiance. "I would never, ever call myself a jazz singer," she states. "I've been categorised that way but my writing is more likely to reference showtunes from *The Sound of Music* to Stephen Sondheim. And I grew up in a household where we listened to calypso and reggae and soca and zouk, so it's important to make that distinction."

Some songs reach outward into broader political territory: *Tief* calls for reparations and confronts the legacy of colonial theft with quiet urgency, while *Ton Amour* weaves personal experience into a cautionary tale about narcissism and survival, set against a breezy reggaeton-tinged backdrop. Meanwhile, *Blue Mountain* remembers the simple, profound freedom of hiking Jamaica's misty peaks — a snapshot of nature, transcendence, and bittersweet return.

Elsewhere, *Seaweed* captures the dreamlike memory of swimming through thick Caribbean waters, co-written in Miami with Liset Alea, while *Rain on My Heart* offers a tender promise to someone weighed down by sorrow — a hand extended toward the light.

Since emerging with her debut *You & I* in 2016 — a self-produced set of exquisitely restrained torch songs that earned her a performance on *Later...* with Jools Holland — ALA.NI has built a reputation as a distinctive voice beyond easy classification. Her 2020 follow-up, *ACCA*, layered beatbox and vocal textures into dense, intricate arrangements, drawing contributions from figures like LaKeith Stanfield and Iggy Pop. Along the way, she has collaborated and performed with artists as diverse as Mary J. Blige, Blur, Nitin Sawhney, Andrea Bocelli, Chassol, and Jon Batiste.



For Sunshine Music, ALA.NI invited French jazz fusion artist Clément Petit to co-produce — a first for her. Petit, known for his tributes to Ryuichi Sakamoto with the band Asynchrone, and for his work with Roseaux (on whose latest album ALA.NI also features), brings a subtle wideness to the record's textures without blurring ALA.NI's crystalline vision. The result is her warmest, most inviting album to date — an open-armed embrace of life's bittersweetness, delivered with grace, humour, and quiet defiance.

The album closes with Best of Me, a tribute to Tony O'Saul, a mentor who believed in ALA.NI's voice before she did — a reminder that sometimes the greatest gifts we carry forward are those others first saw in us.

A singer, songwriter, and producer in full command of her craft, ALA.NI continues to refine the balance between nostalgia and modernity, storytelling and atmosphere. Sunshine Music is less an escape than a reclamation — a way of carrying light through dark places, and a reminder that sometimes the brightest songs are born in the coldest rooms.

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TRACK BY TRACK

THIS IS WHY

"This was the first one I wrote, and it feels like it connects with my first album for No Format! (You & I). My guitarist from Trinidad, Marvin Dolly — who now lives in Upstate New York — sent me some guitar parts, and I chopped them up and structured them. This Is Why is about being unable to accept love when it's too easy. I tend to back off rather than leaning into it, and I kind of question it: 'Oh, why is this so easy? Shouldn't it be difficult?' I want to fight for it."

SUMMER MEADOWS

"I definitely wrote this one under my duvet, wishing for sunshine. It was December 2023, and mentally, I was back in Jamaica. The contrabass you hear is actually Clément Petit on the cello, while the carnivalesque trumpets and horns were played by Okiel McIntyre, a great kid I met playing music in Jamaica. I needed someone who knew what Caribbean sunshine feels like! I called him out of the blue — and he just happened to be flying into Paris to play with The Skatalites a few days later, so I grabbed him."

SOMETHING YOU SAID

"This is another piece Marvin sent me, and it's about an instant connection I had with someone. I literally wrote the whole song on my fifteen-minute walk from home to yoga. I just wrote how I felt about him, so I'm grateful for that. I often take a snippet from my life and just amplify it — not an exaggeration, because I want it to sound genuine. For me, that's what storytelling is about."

DON'T WANT TO HATE YOU

"Don't hate me," he said. "I don't want to," I said.

This was the text exchange that inspired this song. It was someone I had a "little moment" with in Jamaica, and we're good friends now. Sometimes you meet someone, you feel a sexual attraction. But then you realise: no, we're just meant to be friends. I'm still attracted to you, but sexual interaction is not the goal. Then you find, together, the expansion of love in other shapes and forms. I think it's healthy that you can move into a strong mutual friendship after something like that. It makes the relationship even more intimate, verbally and physically.



BLUE MOUNTAIN

“When I was in Jamaica, I went hiking in the Blue Mountains every Saturday with a hiking group. Blue Mountain is based on all the things that left a mark on me: the luscious nature, the time we got completely lost, the feeling of re-entering the flatlands after being so high up and not wanting to come down. It was breathtaking. In Kingston, sadly, you can’t really walk around freely. When I got back to Paris, I remember walking for two hours from La Défense to Gambetta and thinking: ‘Oh my God, I can walk again.’”

RAIN ON MY HEART

“This one came from another musical phrase Marvin sent me. I asked him to give it a title that felt right to him, and from there I expanded it. Rain on My Heart is about a guy I met in Jamaica — nothing happened between us, I never kissed him — but there was this deep sorrow he carried. I guess I felt like I could fix it, or at least help. It’s me saying: ‘If you can trust me, I’ll walk with you out of the rain and into the sunshine.’”

TIEF

“This has a kind of ‘Tango Bolero’ feel and was partly inspired by The Mighty Sparrow’s Slave from the 1960s — a song about being taken from Africa. The conversation about reparations is gaining momentum, with countries like Germany starting to return stolen artifacts. But whether it’s the Benin Bronzes, the Elgin Marbles, or the Kohinoor Diamond, there has to be a point where these precious goods are returned to their rightful owners. Beyond that, there’s the question of generational trauma and the accumulation of one-sided wealth. Those past crimes against humanity have to be compensated if we’re ever to be truly equal.”

SEAWEED

“I don’t really have a fixed routine for writing songs, but this one started with a bassline I played on guitar. I wrote the melody over it, but I couldn’t quite get the lyrics. So I asked for help. I went over to Miami to visit my good friend Liset Alea, who’s also an artist — she co-wrote it with me and came up with the title. I just put a little story of me in Jamaica into it, because I’d recently been swimming through seaweed. I thought: ‘I know that feeling — I’m going to write about it.’”

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