

By Ron Netsky Rochester City News



Tessa Souter “Beyond The Blue” Motema Music

Jazz artists are increasingly reaching beyond the genre’s standards to tunes by Radiohead, The Beatles, Björk and other pop songwriters for new vehicles to explore musically. But, as Will Friedwald points out in his liner notes for Tessa Souter wonderful new album, “Beyond The Blue,” few artists turn back to some of the greatest melodies and chord structures ever written in Western music.

That would be the classical repertoire by Beethoven, Brahms, Schubert, Chopin and others. And that’s precisely what Souter has done, along with pianist Steve Kuhn and his trio, with Dave Finck on bass and Billy Drummond, drums. The trio is greatly enhanced by Joe Locke on vibes; Joel Frahm, tenor sax and Gary Versace, accordion.

Souter covers some previous forays into classical/jazz adaptations like “The Lamp Is Low” (Ravel), “Baubles, Bangles and Beads” (Borodin) and “My Reverie” (Debussy), but most of the tunes feature her own lyrics. She conjures a dreamscape of illusory love in her words to Rodrigo’s *Concierto de Aranjuez* and offers a paean to real love in the title tune by Chopin.

Even though the music began as carefully written classical works, the album is recorded fairly spontaneously in the true spirit of jazz. All of the top-tier players get a chance to stretch out and all of them more than rise to the occasion. This album is a bold move on Souter’s part. The strange thing is, it works so well that if you did not know these works, you just might mistake them for jazz standards.