

Jazz Singers

& the **BY BARRY BASSIS**

Blue Note Festival in June



Norah Jones has changed her look—her new album cover was inspired by a poster from a Russ Meyer movie—and her sound. Her latest release, “Little Broken Hearts” was produced by Brian Burton (aka Danger Mouse) and he co-wrote the songs with her and plays various instruments, as does the singer. The CD is edgier than Jones’ prior work, perhaps because this is a break-up album. Did some jerk actually dump beautiful and talented Jones for a 22-year old named Miriam? Jones may not achieve her ambition of murdering her rival but she has created a killer album with spooky effects and catchy tunes. Jones will bring her broken heart to Summer Stage on July 3rd at 7 p.m. Go to www.summerstage.org for the calendar of events at city parks this summer.

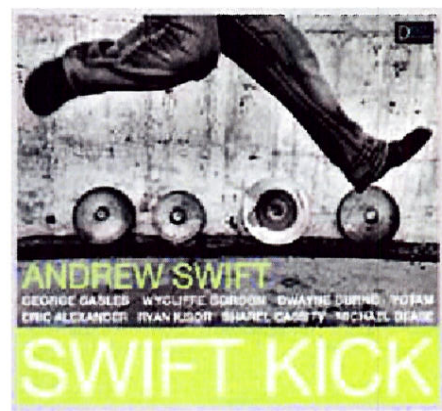


Tessa Souter once wrote a book entitled, “Anything I Can Do, You Can Do Better” (2006). The title is a bit of a stretch because when it comes to jazz singing, you can’t do better than the author. She also happens to be a talented songwriter and her new album displays not only her vocal expertise but also her lyric writing. “Beyond the Blue” (on Motéma Music) is unusual in that all the music is by classical composers, including Beethoven, Brahms, Schubert, and Chopin. Three of the songs are familiar pop standards: “The Lamp Is Low” (Ravel), “My Reverie” (Debussy), and “Baubles, Bangles and Beads” (Borodin). For the other tunes, Souter supplied her own words, often dealing with romance. The album’s title track is drawn from Chopin’s Prelude in E Minor (which in 1963 also inspired Antonio Carlos Jobim’s “How Insensitive”). Fauré’s Elegy is reimagined as “Brand New Day,” which Souter wrote for Japan after the tsunami of March 2011. The core group is comprised of pianist Steve Kuhn and his excellent trio (David Finck, bass, and Billy Drummond, drums), augmented on certain tracks by tenor saxophonist Joel Frahm and Gary Versace on accordion in addition to Locke. On June 4th, Souter will perform songs from “Beyond the Blue” at the Blue Note club with Kenny Werner, p; Joel Frahm, ts; Will Holhouser, acc; Sean Smith, b; Billy Drummond, d).



Meshell Ndegeocello is another standout singer-songwriter (also a bass player) and her new album, “Weather” (produced by Joe Henry, on Naive) deals with love but mostly in a subdued manner. If Souter’s voice leaps out of the speaker, Ndegeocello often sings in a husky whisper that occasionally breaks into spoken lines. On “Objects In Mirror Are Closer Than They Appear”, she sings “Tragically longing for the past / I think about you every day / While I loiter on your doorstep.” Potent as her own songs are, the highpoint of the CD is Ndegeocello’s performance of Leonard Cohen’s haunting “Chelsea Hotel.” On June 28th, Meshell Ndegeocello will perform at Highline Ballroom.

Ndegeocello’s concert is part of the fantastic lineup at the Blue Note Jazz Festival (June 10-30). Actually, the performers are not only from the jazz world but also rock ‘n’ roll, country/bluegrass and classical. Shows will take place at the Blue Note Club as well as the Highline Ballroom, BB King’s and other venues. Among the diverse lineup will be Little Richard, Arturo Sandoval, Jerry Douglas, Kathleen Battle with Cyrus Chestnut, Savion Glover, McCoy Tyner, Bela Fleck, Marcus Roberts, Cassandra Wilson and more. This is a show that can’t be missed! Go to bluenotejazzfestival.com for the complete schedule.



Andrew Swift is an extremely talented instrumentalist to watch. His debut album, “Swift Kick” (on D Clef Records) shows that he is interested in far more than showing off his own impressive technique. I also like the fact that he works with top-flight musicians and doesn’t restrict himself to his own contemporaries. With a wide range of musical interests he can be appreciated by many. And he often works as the drummer for saxophonist Sharel Cassity and her quintet and the Matt Garrison Project and both saxophonists are here as well as trombonist Michael Dease (who produced the album) plus bassist Dwayne Burno, pianist George Cables, and others. Trombonist Wycliffe Gordon has a likeably gruff vocal on “Brandy” and sweet-voiced Vanessa Perca is featured on two songs, Jimmy Heath’s “The Rio Dawn” and the Bacharach-David “Alfie.” Swift reveals his range as a composer with “Soldier” and “Song For Sherin.” On Sundays in June and July, Swift will be appearing at St. John’s Lutheran Church on Christopher Street with the Sharel Cassity Group. Swift will also be playing with his group – Lonnie Plaxico, Jeb Patton, and Matt Garrison—on Wednesday, July 25th at the Hudson Park Bandshell in New Rochelle. Her voice is silky smooth and shouldn’t be missed. Make an effort to go to either event and I know you won’t leave disappointed!