

Jazz is Tessa Souter's 'obsession'



Tessa Souter: *Obsession* (Motema 233045)

Singer Tessa Souter became a successful magazine journalist after raising her son, and then put that career on hold to take a mid-life detour into jazz. Souter will perform at the RegattaBar in Harvard Square at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday.

By JAY N. MILLER

Tessa Souter is not the kind of woman who's afraid to tackle new horizons. That's how she became a successful magazine journalist after raising her son, and then put that career on hold to take a mid-life detour into jazz.

It's also how she approaches her music, and why her forthcoming album, "Obsession," due to be released by Motema Music on Aug. 11, has so many indelible moments. How many jazz singers, after all, interpret both the Beatles and Cream?

Souter says she "fell into" both of her careers at different life stages.

She described herself as a typical workaholic at an early magazine job in [London], coming home at 10 p.m. many nights. Her son failed his courses that term, she said, but once she quit and started freelancing, his grades completely turned around.

[Once in San Francisco], Souter made use of her British background – she’s half English, half Trinidadian – as a freelance writer for several magazines in the United Kingdom.

One night, a few friends coaxed her to a karaoke night, and since she loved singing around the house, she got up and belted out Julie London’s “Cry Me a River.”

She began dating a musicologist, who encouraged her to pursue her music potential. When he moved to New York, she followed, and began performing at open mike nights around the city.

It wasn’t long before she had her own gigs in small clubs with duos and trios. The relationship ended, but Souter had a new career, found a steady gig in New York, and by 2000 was recording her first demo CD.

“After we broke up, I found a lot of catharsis through singing,” Souter said. “I had become addicted to singing.”

“Obsession” is Souter’s third album, which she co-produced with Sue Edwards, using a band of seven musicians centered on the acoustic guitar of Jason Ennis. It makes for a very intimate sound, where Souter’s clear contralto and its marvelous tone rings through in all its glory.