PRESS RELEASE

**Tessa Souter releases new album, *Picture in Black and White*, inspired by her discovery at age 28 that her birth father was black**

“A pensive journey across the color line.” **Jazz Album of the Week**, **Clive Davis,** **London Times**

“A brilliant and beautiful new album, which glows with a universal resonance.” **Paul Freeman,** **PopCultureMatters**

"No jazz singer is exploring the confluence of the personal and the political with more probing intelligence than Tessa Souter.” **Andrew Gilbert, San Francisco Chronicle**

“… a masterpiece, both musically and technically.”

**Tony Andrews, HiFi Answers**

“A beautiful, spiritual album. . . Picture in Black and White feels like the kind of journey saxophonist Wayne Shorter has taken us on with albums such as JuJu and The Soothsayer.“ - **Marc Myers, JazzWax**

"[A] remarkable journey to the interior of the human heart." **Victor L. Schermer, AllAboutJazz**

“Always a singer with a dramatist’s flair for embodying a lyric and an attraction to adventurous settings, Souter’s autobiographical new album [traces] her roots through Africa, Andalusia and Celtic Britain . . .  with an eclectic collection that ranges from Kenyan song to Ornette Coleman to a U2 hit, transforming each with an intelligent ear for sincere globalism.” **Shaun Brady, Philly Jazz News**

“A masterpiece.” **Jack Garner, Rochester Democrat and Chronicle**

“. . .  an exquisite musical exploration of her identity. . . . gorgeous tone and impeccable phrasing, Souter’s voice is thrilling throughout.” **Ron Netsky, Rochester City News**

“This album is much more than a rich collection of unusual songs, beautifully sung. It has the narrative arc of a fine short story, told with the intelligence and heart that Tessa brings to all her singing and prose-writing. Once more she has taken the endangered art of the album and mined it to its fullest.”   **James Gavin, two-time recipient of ASCAP’s Deems Taylor-Virgil Thomson Award for excellence in music journalism**

**Band: Yotam Silberstein (guitar), Yasushi Nakamura (bass), Keita Ogawa (percussion), Adam Platt (piano), Dana Leong (cello), Billy Drummond (cymbals and drums)**

**Street date** October 5, 2018

**Label** NOA Records

**Genre** Jazz, World, Folk, Vocals

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**Inspired by her discovery at age 28 that her birth father was black, *Picture in Black and White,* a meditation on roots and identity, traces Tessa’s “musical DNA” from Africa to the Caribbean, Celtic Britain and Andalusian Spain – a journey through a world of exotic sounds and unusual meters, mythic characters and ancestral ghosts**

 A protégé of jazz vocal legend **Mark Murphy**, who called her a “true musician,”  “very moving” and “an extraordinary talent,” Tessa Souter, whose distinctive and exotically beautiful style of jazz evokes Andalusian Spain, North Africa and the Middle East, as well as the Celtic folk music she grew up listening to, has established herself as an uncommonly creative vocalist and songwriter over the past two decades. Her most recent, Beyond the Blue (Motéma) – an all-star Third-Stream project with piano great Steve Kuhn, featuring Souter’s original lyrics to classical gems by Albinoni, Chopin and others– was Clive Davis’ Number Six pick for **Best Jazz Album of the Year** in the British Sunday Times.

Utilizing the talents of some of New York's finest first-call musicians, Picture in Black and White (Noa) is a riveting musical account of the journey launched by her discovery at age 28 that her birth father was black. A mixture of originals and familiar non-standards, including Wayne Shorter's 'Ana Maria' (with Tessa's lyrics, ​for which he granted her shared writing credit), Ornette Coleman's 'Lonely Woman' and Milton Nascimento's 'Nothing Will Be As It Was', it is an emotionally resonant invitation through music to reflect on the African diaspora experience of slavery, loss, love, redemption and the pellucid and lasting repercussions of that period in history.

"My mother had quieted the school bullying about my permanent tan by telling me, at 12, that my birth father was from Spain, and white, and that my grandmother was a flamenco dancer," says Tessa, whose music contains "Middle Eastern, Brazilian and flamenco elements in an airy jazz framework." (*Philadelphia City Paper*) The reality was a seismic shift in consciousness. "Growing up white, you don't just wake up the next day black," she says. "I had no direct connection to it, so I was voraciously reading novels, slave memoirs and history books to really dig in to my heritage. A few years ago, I started hearing familiar songs through that prism, and the idea for the album was born.” ­­

So 'A Taste of Honey' becomes a song about being stolen from Africa and the people left behind. 'Lonely Woman' is for the husbands and wives who were separated throughout slavery. 'Nothing Will Be As It Was' is about the Reconstruction and that period of freedom and hope. “The lyrics are unchanged,” says Tessa. “I’m just feeling them differently.”

Tessa also added Yoruba lyrics to the outro of Vicki Burns’ ‘Siren Song.’ “One of my great great grandparents was Garifuna, who are descended from the survivors of a Spanish slave ship from Nigeria that was shipwrecked off St. Vincent in the Caribbean,” she says. “The lyrics thank the Yoruba gods for creating the storm which saved them from slavery.”

“The themes – love, loss, freedom, even family secrets – are universal,” says Tessa. “It’s rare to grow up white and then find out as an adult that you are black, but when I tell the story on gigs, people come up and tell me their own hidden narratives – a blurred Jewish heritage or a divorced grandfather they were told was dead to cover up the shame of divorce.”

As geneticist Professor David Altshuler writes, in his foreword to Henry Louis Gates’ Finding Your Roots. “Few questions are as universal as where did I come from? We ask because ancestors are family, even if we didn’t have a chance to know them.” 󠄀

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TESSA SOUTER BIO

Born of English and Trinidadian parents, New York-based, vocalist, Tessa Souter – an amazing natural talent whose crystal clear voice has captivated audiences all over the world – has a distinctive and exotically beautiful style of jazz which evokes Andalusian Spain, North Africa and the Middle East, as well as the Celtic folk music she grew up listening to.  “Magnificent! She blew me away!” said soul-jazz legend, Jon Lucien. “Her voice is sinuous and elastic, stretching and caressing a melody with an actress’ sense of the emotional meaning of each lyric,” said the *Philadelphia City Paper*.  “Her rendition of ‘The Creator Has A Master Plan’ proves that it is possible to be both sensual and spiritual at the same time,” said the *New York Sun*. And, in a rave review of her California debut in the *Los Angeles Times,* Don Heckman called hers “one of the most imaginatively programmed vocal sets of recent memory.”

Since then, her artistry has gone from strength to strength, taking her on four sold out tours of the philharmonic halls of Russia (she will be returning next season for her fifth tour) and performances at SF Jazz, Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola, Mezzrow, the Blue Note, Jazz Standard, Joe’s Pub, Pizza Express, Ronnie Scott’s, the London and Edinburgh Jazz Festivals, and the Kennedy Center Millennium Stage. She has appeared six times at the Xerox Rochester International Jazz Festival, where in 2015 she was one of only four (out of 4,000 musicians) to be filmed by PBS Television (her one-hour concert and interview was broadcast across 92 networks) and where, in 2017, the *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle* singled her out (from a huge roster of jazz A-listers) as “the one performer not to miss” over the entire nine-day festival. Her monthly residency at New York’s iconic 55 Bar is frequently standing room only. Her upcoming debut tour in Japan is already partially sold out.

A protégé of jazz vocal legend Mark Murphy, who called her a “true musician,”  “very moving” and “an extraordinary talent,” Souter has established herself as an uncommonly creative vocalist and songwriter with four critically-acclaimed albums, *Listen Love*  (Nara, 2004), *Nights of Key Largo* (Venus, 2008), which was awarded Swing Journal’s prestigious Gold Disc Award, *Obsession* (Motéma, 2009) and *Beyond the Blue* (Venus-Motéma, 2013), a UK *Sunday Times magazine* Top Ten Jazz CD of the Year, for which she set her own “exhilaratingly mature lyrics” (*Chicago Examiner*) to favorite classical melodies. Her new album, *Picture in Black and White*(Noa)  is a riveting musical journey inspired by her discovery at age 28 that her estranged birth father was Trinidadian and black, having been brought up to believe he was Spanish and white.

As well as making five albums as a leader, she also appears on legendary bassist Charnett Moffett‘s *Spirit of Sound* (Motéma)album and on French singer Pascalito’s upcoming*The Picture of Rafael Ohayon,*and has performed and/or recorded with a veritable who’s who of jazz, including Steve Kuhn, Alan Broadbent, Kenny Werner, Yotam Silberstein, Yasushi Nakamura, Joe Locke, David Gilmore, Marvin Sewell, Billy Drummond, Joel Frahm, Lew Soloff, Romero Lubambo, Larry Koonse, Dana Leong, Francois Moutin, Lynne Arriale and Howard Johnson, who says of her, “Her brilliant lyrics and songs make her stand out from the pack so very much, not to mention how wonderfully she handles other people’s material.” To quote Los Angeles-based guitarist, Larry Koonse: “Tessa Souter has all the qualities I value most in a musician: great time, beautiful phrasing, gorgeous sound, a respect for silence, an emotional connection to the moment and a wonderful ability to tell a story. She is the ‘real thing’ in every way.”

**www.tessasouter.com**