



TESSA SOUTER – SOULFUL INTIMATE JAZZ



LIVE REVIEW

By Charlene Gianetti on Playing Around
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For jazz lovers, it just doesn't get any better than this—55 Christopher Street, a hole in the wall that appears to be stuck in a time warp, stirring sounds from a guitar in the hands of a master, and mellifluous notes from perhaps the best jazz vocalist on the scene today. To say that Tessa Souter sings jazz is to dramatically understate her performance. She wraps her voice around each note, infuses the lyrics with emotion, and, in the process, transforms even well known classics into something different and quite wonderful.



Souter does sing in larger venues, (See our review of her performance at Joe's Pub). In this intimate West Village setting, however, she seems to be in the zone. Before her second set begins, she walks around the room, greeting many patrons by name and introducing herself to anyone she hasn't met. The crowd, gathering around small, worn, wooden tables or perched on bar stools, is a microcosm of jazz lovers in New York—young, old, straight, gay, professionals, and not-so-professional. What they have in common is Tessa Souter. Hear her sing once, and you will follow her anywhere.

This evening she is joined by guitarist Gene Bertoncini, whose resume includes playing with Benny Goodman, Tony Bennett, Lena Horne, Nancy Wilson, and Vic Damone, as well as stints with orchestras on shows for Merv Griffin, Jack Paar, and Johnny Carson. So, we understand that Bertoncini is selective when choosing his musical partners. With Tessa Souter he has once again chosen well. It is a brilliant pairing. Bertoncini doesn't just back up Souter, his brilliant accompaniment lifts her show to another level.

Souter's choices are a nice mix of new ballads and well-known standards. "All or Nothing at All," delivered with less swing than befitting Sinatra truly becomes a heartfelt lover's anthem. Other standouts that we recognize include "East of the Sun and West of the Moon" and "Night and Day," giving both singer and guitarist a chance to shine. Souter sings some songs where she contributed the lyrics: "Come with me to a time that might have been." In between, she connects with the audience, sharing tidbits about her personal life (she had a child at age 16 and so got a late start on her career). In this small setting, we might be sitting, having a drink with a good friend.

For her closing, Souter chose the perfect love song, "That's All." As she sang, "I can only give you love that lasts forever," she cast a spell that we took with us out into the warm, summer night.