



JazzTimes

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TESSA SOUTER

Obsession (Motéma)



Tessa Souter, who didn't migrate from her native England to San Francisco until her son was into adulthood and spent her first few stateside years as a journalist, may be late to the jazz game, but she's catching up with remarkable alacrity. Before relocating to Manhattan in the late '90s and building an impressive fan base among local club goers, Souter also found time to write a self-help tome called (with apologies to Irving Berlin), *Anything I Can Do You Can Do Better*. Rather ironic, considering that jazz chanteuses who can interpret a lyric better than Souter are growing increasingly few.

Souter's crystalline contralto and impeccable phrasing are mighty arrows in her quiver, but it is her ability to become one with a song, finding its intrinsic core and allowing its sentiment to grow organically, that enables her to score successive bull's-eyes. Hear it here as she plumbs the aching loneliness of "Eleanor Rigby" without judgment or despondence, captures both the claustrophobia and expansiveness of Cream's "White Room," and opts to ignite the escalating desire of Milton Nascimento's "Make the City Ours Tonight" with a sly twinkle rather than a blaze. Her "Afro-Blue" (seamlessly blended with "Footprints") is an exquisite exercise in seductive spell-casting, and her own compositions—the pensively bereft "Now and Then" and the primal, passionate "Usha's Wedding"—are hallmarks of emotional transparency. **Review by Christopher Loudon, March 2010**



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