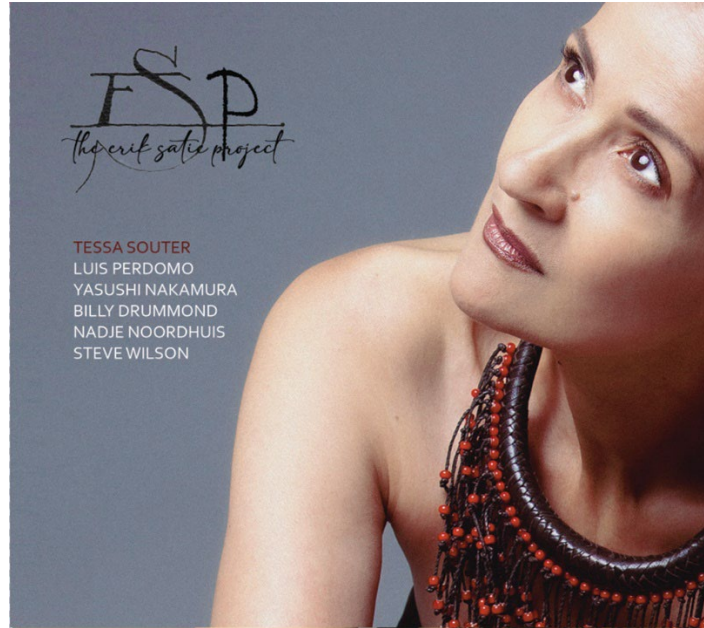


Acclaimed vocalist Tessa Souter finds personal resonance in the delicate piano music of French composer Erik Satie on her stunning and moving new album



Tessa Souter - Vocals and lyrics
Luis Perdomo - Piano (all tracks) and percussion (Track 1)
Yasushi Nakamura - Bass
Billy Drummond - Drums
Nadja Noordhuis - Trumpet and flugelhorn (Tracks 2, 10, 11)
Steve Wilson - Soprano saxophone (Tracks 2, 6, 9)
Pascal Borderies - Spoken word (Track 10)

Mixed and mastered by David Darlington, New York
Recorded at the Bunker Studio, Brooklyn, New York, by Aaron Nevezie
Vocals recorded by David Darlington, New York

The Erik Satie Project (ESP)* pairs chamber jazz interpretations featuring Souter's evocative lyrics with complementary pieces from Miles Davis' *E.S.P.* and classic French *chansons

Vocalist Tessa Souter makes no claims of psychic ability. Her decision to build her latest project around the French composer and pianist Erik Satie, though, proved remarkably prescient. Over the several years spent conceiving the project, researching Satie's life and work, selecting and arranging material and producing her latest album, Souter found her life experiences resonating with Satie's music in profound and unpredictable ways.

Most crucially, Souter suffered the unforeseen deaths of two important figures in her life: first, a beloved supporter and fan, who had become "Uncle Ken" over the years, and who she tended to as his healthcare proxy for his final days; and then her mother, who passed away following a series of falls that saw Souter

crossing back and forth over the Atlantic to her native London. Where Satie's music proved an ideal vehicle for the vocalist to express the complex emotions evoked by these life-changing events, the composer's eccentricity reminded her of the unconventional characters that she'd grown up around as a result of having young Bohemian parents – her mother was an artist's nude model, her adoptive father, an art historian.

ESP: The Erik Satie Project takes the French composer's music as its beating heart, its arteries branching into other vital inspirations. The album's title, *ESP: The Erik Satie Project* is a nod to the Miles Davis 1965 classic of the same name, several pieces on which share a quality of deceptive simplicity with Satie's compositions. "You could almost think of Satie as an early jazz musician," Souter concludes. "I found that compelling." And despite the composer's quintessentially Gallic voice, Souter heard echoes of the British folk music – bands like Fairport Convention and Pentangle – that were among her earliest influences.

Souter penned new lyrics to five of Satie's delicate yet mesmerizing piano pieces, and paired a sixth with the text of his sole surviving letter to Suzanne Valadon – who remained his lifelong obsession after a brief affair in their early 20s. Those are supplemented by two tunes from Davis' *E.S.P.*, a pair of meaningful French *chansons*, and the Sérgio Mendes/Lani Hall classic "Song of No Regrets." The album features Souter's longtime working band with bassist Yasushi Nakamura, pianist Luis Perdomo (who also provided several insightful arrangements) and Souter's partner in life and music, legendary drummer Billy Drummond. They are joined at carefully chosen moments by trumpeter Nadjé Noordhuis and soprano saxophonist Steve Wilson.

While she'd inevitably come to know Satie's *Gnossiennes* and *Gymnopédies* through their ubiquity in movie soundtracks and TV commercials, it was hearing French singer Anne Ducros' wordless, Arabic-tinged riff on "Gnossienne No. 1" which originally inspired her to write a lyric. Souter's own rendition of that familiar, elusive miniature opens the album, retitled "A Song for You" and poetically detailing a love affair clouded by the inner darkness hidden within one partner's benign guise. The uneasy rumble of percussion and somber, enshrouding chords in Perdomo's arrangement perfectly illustrate the foreboding narrative. Its mirror image can be found in "Holding On To Beauty," ("Gnossienne No. 3," another Perdomo arrangement), Souter's lyric to which is a loving ode to, and features the sensitive drumming of, her husband, Billy Drummond.

In "Gnossienne No. 2" Souter discovered a serenity and meditative beauty that led her to pen "Peace." The two *Gymnopédies* on the album were indelibly marked by life events that coincided with the album's writing. "No. 1" becomes "Rayga's Song," named after the birth of Nakamura's son; a second baby for the bassist resulted in "D'où Venon-Nous," set to "Gymnopédie No. 3." That birth, however, coincided with the passing of beloved Uncle Ken, leading Souter to muse on reincarnation and the possibility that a new baby might nurture the soul of this dearly missed elder. The song, loosely arranged by Drummond in the studio, is highlighted by the scintillating soprano of Steve Wilson, parried by Drummond's turbulent rhythms.

The final Satie piece is the album's shortest – ironically, as the composer's score for "Vexations" indicates that its short motif should be repeated 840 times, which if adhered to can take anywhere from 14 to 24 hours. Here it's performed, via the achingly gorgeous trumpet of Nadjé Noordhuis, just enough times to accompany a reading of Satie's only surviving letter to Suzanne Valadon. The remaining 300, discovered after his death, were delivered to, and promptly burned by Valadon.

Revisiting Miles Davis' *E.S.P.* in light of her Satie listening, Souter found that two tracks – "Mood," composed by bassist Ron Carter, and Wayne Shorter's title track – shared with Satie a surface simplicity masking emotional depths and complexity. Both make perfect complements to the album – "Mood" with Souter's lyric as "Musica Universalis" and "E.S.P." lyricized by Cassandra Wilson as "Never Broken."

The demise and death of Souter's mother looms movingly over the album, nowhere more than in "Ne Me Quitte Pas," the immortal Jacques Brel ballad best known in versions by Édith Piaf and Nina Simone. The song was a favorite of her mother's, and the only track on the album that she heard, days before her passing. Mother and daughter had sung it together over the phone earlier, an enduring memory from those final months. Both it and Léo Ferré's "Avec le Temps" are especially meaningful inclusions, the latter a longtime favorite from Souter's concerts in the form of her own lyric, "I Know With Time."

It proves a perfect fit. "My lyrics and song choices evolve out of my life experience," she explains. "And everything that was happening during this period inevitably led to songs dealing with such massive topics as love – bad and good – death, reincarnation, and the mysteries of life."

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