

ROCHESTER INTERNATIONAL JAZZ FESTIVAL 2009

Tessa Souter returns to the Rochester International Jazz Festival.

British Invasion

Billy Drummond

The festival's new UK Series is largest U.S. session of jazz artists from across the pond

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STAFF WRITER

Tessa Souter doesn't take ice in her beverages. The jazz singer was out sipping refreshments with a few English chaps after moving to San Francisco when she noticed the phenomenon. "They don't take ice either," she recalls. "Oh my God, I'm British."

For Souter, who stunned audiences with her ethnically hued ballad singing at the 2007 Rochester International Jazz Festival and will return this year to do the same, it's a little easier to pin down cultural mannerisms than music.

"Of course, I was born in Britain, so on that level, that's the thing I'm bringing with everything that I do," she says, though her father is Trinidadian. "It's all sensitized through my being, which is this mixture of things, races, cultures and all that sort of business. (England's) a very multicultural kind of place. My style of music seems to have a lot of that in it."

The Rochester International Jazz Festival has made it possible to inspect how foreign countries dissect American jazz, and hear it in a concentrated output. The popular "Nordic Series," which has set Rochester apart in the country's jazz festival circuit, unleashed wildly experimental jazz. The Scandinavian countries stretched Rochester audiences with its free-thinking approach to sound, rhythm, electronics and even basic instrumental technique. Despite the unknown factor of these artists, it has been a magnet for festival-goers seeking refreshing experiences.

With a newly formed "UK Series," which will be the largest showing of British jazzers in the United States, this year might beg the question: How do the Brits do jazz? Along with Souter, pianist Neil Cowley and saxophonist Tony Kofi give some clues as to what sounds they'll be sporting at the festival.

Souter — for whom singing is a second career pursued while living in



Other British musicians visiting RIJF include The Neil Cowley Trio, left, and saxophonist Tony Kofi, bottom left.

Photos provided



New York City — does it with a mix of world music mixed in the earthy stew she sings. She has a penchant for adding vocal decoration to instrumental tunes, such as Pat Martino's "Willow Weep for Me," Pharoah Sanders' "The Creator Has a Master Plan" and even Rodrigo's classical guitar warhorse "Concierto de Aranjuez." Staying clear of over-worn vocal standards, her focus is on de-

If you go

Neil Cowley: 6:45 and 8:45 p.m. next Sunday.

Tessa Souter: 6:45 and 8:45 p.m. June 17.

Tony Kofi: 6:45 and 8:45 p.m. June 18.

Where: Christ Church, 141 East Ave.

Tickets: Club Pass show.

Web: www.neilcowleytrio.com, www.tessasouter.com, www.myspace.com/tonykofi.

veloping a personal style with a unique repertoire.

"I always thought my music had a Middle Eastern, North African vibe. I've never understood why," she says, before recalling her use of minor scales and almost Celtic sounds. "That's very old English. I didn't realize that." As for African roots, "It's synthesized into English music, and now I've taken it and done my thing with it."

On the other side of the spectrum is Cowley, a classical pianist turned jazzier via British rock and pop. His foray into jazz can be traced to a

Festival tickets

The eighth annual Rochester International Jazz Festival runs from Friday through June 20.

■ For most shows at the Eastman Theatre, 60 Gibbs St., tickets (\$19-\$85) are available at the festival's Ticket Shop, corner of East Avenue and Gibbs Street (both only a \$1 service charge); and Ticketmaster, (800) 745-3000 or www.ticketmaster.com. Admission to the Eastman Youth Jazz Orchestra at 7:30 p.m. and Eastman School of Music Jazz Scholarships Performance at 8 p.m. June 15 is free.

■ Club Passes (\$135, plus a \$4 service charge) offer admission, space permitting, to more than 125 shows at State Street Bar & Grill (at the Rochester Plaza Hotel), 70 State St.; Kilbourn Hall, 26 Gibbs St.; Max of Eastman Place, 287 E. Main St.; Montage, 50 Chestnut St.; Harro East Ballroom, 155 N. Chestnut St.; Lutheran Church of the Reformation, 111 N. Chestnut St.; Christ Church, 141 East Ave.; Xerox Auditorium, 100 S. Clinton Ave.; and the Big Tent, Main and Gibbs streets. Buy in person at the Ticket Shop. You can also buy them through Ticketmaster until noon on Wednesday.

■ If available, single tickets for Club Pass locations are \$20-\$25 at the door.

■ Admission is free at three outdoor stages — Jazz Street Stage, Gibbs Street and East Avenue; East Avenue and Chestnut Street; and East Avenue and Alexander Street — Bausch & Lomb Public Library, 115 South Ave.; and concerts on the Mary Jemison Riverboat, on the Genesee River (launches at Corn Hill Landing on Exchange Boulevard).

For details, go to www.rochesterjazz.com.

Parking

The East End Garage, Scio and Main streets, is \$2 after 5 p.m. and on weekends. For jam sessions at the Rochester Plaza Hotel, the Sister Cities Garage, 28 N. Fitzhugh St., is \$1 per hour (free if you only park one hour); \$6.35 maximum.