



TESSA SOUTER | SHADOWS AND SILENCE: THE ERIK SATIE PROJECT (Noanara Music)

Reviewed by Dee Dee McNeil

Tessa Souter, vocals/lyrics; Luis Perdomo, piano; Yasushi Nakamura, bass; Billy Drummond, drums; Nadjé Noordhuis, trumpet/flugelhorn; Steve Wilson, soprano saxophone; Pascal Borderies, spoken word.

100 years ago, on July 1st Erik Satie died. Satie was born on May 17, 1866, in Honfleur, Normandy. A composer, who first earned his living as a café pianist in Montmartre but soon began composing his own works. The Oxford Dictionary of Music references Satie as “directing a new generation of French composers away from the Wagner-influenced impressionism.”

Well, Tessa Souter fell under the eccentric composer’s spell when she heard a wordless vocal version of “Gnossienne No. 1” written by Satie and first interpreted by singer Anne Ducros. This becomes the opening tune on Souter’s new album. She calls it “A Song for You.”

This song exposes Tessa Souter’s amazing lyrical abilities. I am also impressed by the creative way she weaves French lyrics into her English mix of poetic words. Luis Perdomo’s piano solo is as breathtaking and creative as Tessa Souter’s song lyrics and vocal presentation.

I am not the only one to be intoxicated by Souter’s artistic lyrics. Her lyrics to Wayne Shorter’s “Ana Maria” composition impressed the late composer and saxophonist so much, that Shorter gave Souter shared writing on his already popular tune. The lyricist introduced it on her album titled, “Picture in Black and White,” where it attracted the attention of Kurt Elling, who recorded it on his GRAMMY-nominated album, “Wildflowers Volume 1.”

You can hold her lyrics in your hands and internalize her exquisite lyrical poems, because she has included them in this album release on paper, slipped inside the pocket of her “Shadows and Silence: The Erik Satie Project” cd jacket. When I read them, they become even more powerful.

The second song on this unique presentation she calls “Mood (Musica Universalis)” that speaks of time waiting for no one and change always predictable in life. This tune is not a Satie composition but is a Ron Carter/Miles Davis collaboration that Souter has put lyrics to in a lovely way.

Tessa Souter, admired publicly by both Mark Murphy and NEA Jazz Master, Sheila Jordan, revitalizes the essence of jazz. Her lyrical renderings and her singing songs less sung by vocalists is impressive. Sometimes an album of music can become an artistic masterpiece. As an artist, you cannot ever predict what will touch the hearts, souls and minds of listeners. It’s like the ‘standing ovation’ the artist sometimes is rewarded with, it’s both unpredictable and a welcome surprise that rewards the work, the struggle, the artform, the ego. To my ears, this is a unique masterpiece of poetic, lyrical, and musical art.