



**Acclaimed vocalist and lyricist Tessa Souter approaches the work of Erik Satie with jazz-inspired eloquence on *Shadows and Silence: The Erik Satie Project***

**Featuring Luis Perdomo (piano), Yasushi Nakamura (bass), Billy Drummond (drums), Nadjé Nordhuis (trumpet and flugelhorn) and Steve Wilson (soprano saxophone)**

**Available June 27 via NOANARA MUSIC**

**CD Release show at Joe's Pub at 7PM on July 1, the exact date of the 100th anniversary of Erik Satie's death**

On *Shadows and Silence: The Erik Satie Project*, her sixth album as a leader, **Tessa Souter** continues to explore her penchant for collaborating with a broad range of renowned composers, both living and dead. Celebrated for her “startlingly fresh and poetic lyrics” (Michael J. West, Washington City Paper), her words to Wayne Shorter’s “Ana Maria,” impressed the late composer so much, he granted her shared writing credit. Souter’s version of that song on her album *Picture in Black and White* attracted the attention of Kurt Elling who recorded it on his GRAMMY-nominated *Wildflowers Volume 1* album. Her lyrics to Joaquin Rodrigo’s “Concierto de Aranjuez” elicited a personal thank you letter from his daughter, Cecilia. Now, precisely 100 years after his death, she has turned her attention to the music of eccentric French composer, Erik Satie, appending her haunting lyrics to new incarnations of some of his best-known works.

Souter first fell under the spell of Satie when she heard a wordless vocal version of “Gnossienne No. 1” by French singer Anne DuCros two decades ago. Intrigued, she began to write lyrics. But it wasn’t until the pandemic and the forced break it provided that she began to write the words we find here. “My lyrics evolve out of my life experience,” says Souter. She was inspired to write a lyric to “Gymnopedie No. 1” for bassist Yasushi Nakamura’s newborn son, celebrating the miracle of birth, and the optimism of a new father looking forward to the joys of parenthood. That was the genesis of the idea to do a whole album of Satie. Over the next four years she wrote lyrics to “Gnossiennes No. 2,” “Gnossiennes No. 3,” “Gymnopedie No. 3,” and Ron Carter’s “Mood,” all of which reflected what was happening in her life at the time, against the backdrop of COVID—including the deaths of two of her dearest friends and her mother, who died just as she was finishing the album last June.

The demise and death of Souter's mother looms movingly over the album, nowhere more than in "If You Go Away (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 more I got to know Satie, the more I wanted to acknowledge not only his music, but the man himself," says Souter. "I could identify with his nomadic childhood (I went to 16 schools before the age of 15) and the coming and going of important caretakers. He also reminded me of the eccentric figures I attached myself to as a small child, in particular an artist friend of my parents who, like me, loved animals. He fed the foxes in his garden with meat he'd shoplifted from a local supermarket. And like Satie, he fell in love only once and never again.

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

The album really showcases the virtuosity of her longtime working band, GRAMMY-awarded pianist Luis Perdomo (who also provided several insightful arrangements), GRAMMY-nominated bassist Yasushi Nakamura, and the singer'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.

"I'm surprised there aren't more jazz tributes to Satie," says Souter. And although there are many jazz versions of the deceptively simple "Gymnopedie No. 1," there are very few jazz interpretations of his other compositions. The album *Gymnopedies & Gnossiennes* by French pianist, Jacques Loussier, featuring seven Satie compositions—including four variations on "Gymnopedie No. 1"—is something of an exception. "I didn't plan on the album taking this long to make so the 100th anniversary of his death was almost a surprise to me," says Souter. "Now that it's here, it feels like synchronicity to champion his genius with these incredible jazz musicians."

**Tessa Souter is a 2025 Artistic Projects Program grantee from Chamber Music America funded through the generosity of the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation.**

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## **Tessa's Bio**

*New York-based vocalist Tessa Souter /'su:ter/ is a "beguiling artist who infuses everything she interprets with voluptuous intelligence and keen emotional insight." (KQED Arts) Mentored by jazz legends Mark Murphy, who called her "a true musician and extraordinary talent, remarkable and very moving," and NEA Jazz Master Sheila Jordan, who puts her "at the top of my list of great talent," Souter's critically-acclaimed voice and penchant for exploring music mostly untouched by other vocalists, has "set her apart as one of the few exceptional standouts in the crowded field of female jazz singers." (Don Heckman, Los Angeles Times) She has cast an increasingly wide musical net, from her Flamenco-tinged debut, *Listen Love* (Nara, 2004), to *Picture in Black and White* (NOA, 2018), a meditative exploration of her bi-racial heritage, to her*

*upcoming release Shadows and Silence: The Erik Satie Project, her sixth album, due out in 2025. Souter has performed at some of the world's most notable venues, including SF Jazz, the Kennedy Center, Dizzy's, JALC, Mezzrow, the London and Edinburgh Jazz Festivals, the Rochester International Jazz festival, the Blue Note clubs in New York, Beijing and Shanghai and multiple tours of the philharmonic halls of Russia.*