



April 2005



Listen Love

Tessa Souter (Nara Music)

by Donald Elfman

How nice to hear a sophisticated singer who so completely respects the melody, the lyrics and the moment. Ms. Souter contributes much to the evolution of the songs she chooses to perform - she finds ways through phrase, paraphrase and instrumental accompaniment to add rich new color. Like Norma Winstone - whose lyrics for Jimmy Rowles' "The Peacocks" she uses here - Souter understands what is needed to deliver a song. Her voice, her sense of drama, her use of space and shape - all these work towards the sense of birth in each of these performances. You may have heard some of these songs before, but they're newly re-fashioned herein.

Take the Pharoah Sanders/Leon Thomas '60s hymn "The Creator Has a Master Plan", which she de-mystifies. In so doing, Souter finds a different, earthier way to sing it in which none of the spiritual or anthemic quality is lost with an arrangement buoyed by Essiet Essiet's soulful bass and the ethereal guitar of Freddie Bryant.

Souter's singing style feels natural and organic - her rich, dark voice combines with her ability to see the shape of a tune and so the words seem to come from her soul. The production is pure and simple and thus the song stays at the center of consciousness. "Caravan", a song that's seen countless performances by countless singers, is re-animated with new dynamics and a hypnotic vocal arrangement.

"You don't have to believe" says the title of one of the singer's originals, but what happens is that the magic happens and you find yourself believing in what she does after all.

For more information, visit www.tessasouter.com. Souter is at Sweet Rhythm Apr. 1st-2nd. See calendar.