



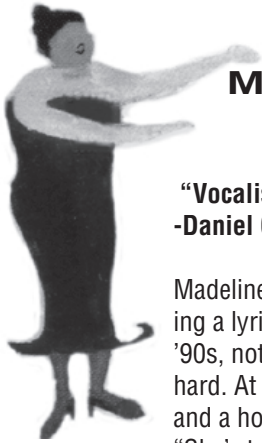
Madeline Eastman - Articles, Pg 1

“Madeline Eastman Can Do No Wrong” -Phil Elwood

Well Now! When singer Madeline Eastman and her musical buddies throw a record release party, things swing from A-tossed — the singing is wonderful, the audience is enthusiastic and, to borrow a lyric from “Cabaret,” “even the orchestra is beautiful.” In fine voice, singing not only material from her new “Point of Departure” album but also some gems from earlier recorded adventures (she’s had two previous releases), Eastman seemed incapable on Thursday night at Yoshi’s of doing anything wrong, either by her own high standards or by those of the overflow audience, which erupted in tumultuous sounds of delight after each number; sometimes, in fact, in mid-number. Since the first time I heard her — longer ago than her looks today belie (it was in the late ’70s) — Eastman has maintained a natural spirit on stage, and in her singing. A couple of years out of the College of San Mateo in those days, she was singing lots of cabaret material mixed with some pretty adventurous jazz stuff, like Miles’ “Four” and guitarist George Barnes’ arrangement of “Fascinating Rhythm.” She’d studied some with Barnes and often used his SF.-based protégé Duncan James in her backup group; from both, and from drummer Vince Lateano (whom she married in May) and probably from others she absorbed a rhythmic sense which in many ways is her real forte. Eastman and bassist Jeff Chambers did some nifty a cappella duets at Yoshi’s, full of little tricks and nuances she’d no doubt picked up from Barnes. Tom Harrell, trumpet and flugelhorn, and Lateano on drums are two of the four accompanying artists on Eastman’s new record release who accompanied her at Yoshi’s — her pianist on the record is Mike Wofford. On the disc’s “Calling You” it’s Paul Potyten, who was the first pianist I heard with her, at The City; otherwise Eastman sticks with Wofford’s piano on disc, but I found that locally based Mark Levine is a fuller, richer and more inventive keyboardist in the long run. Certainly at Yoshi’s Levine was magnificent, working in Bud Powell-like runs underscored by rich harmonic lines. Eastman doesn’t scat, in the classic sense, but she does take lyric liberties and melodic risks. As Lester Young put it, she’s got “good ears.” Like Harry Truman, who once commented (upon seeing an abstract impressionist’s painting of a cow), “If he can’t do any better than that, why doesn’t he just take a snapshot of the damn thing?” I tend to like renditions of standards (like “After You’ve Gone” and “You Are My Sunshine”) that honor the composer and lyricist’s original manuscript. At Yoshi’s, in both cases, Eastman (whose voice is remarkably well pitched and controlled) shifted rhythm, broke melody, added a few vocal lines and, essentially, converted the charts into her own songs. And, if “it ain’t what cha do, it’s the way how cha do it” is your creed, then Eastman’s experiments with old pop tunes is a mighty success. Her version of “Don’t Explain” (Billie Holiday’ melody, Art Herzog’s words) was magnificent — trumpeter Harrell completely avoiding the melody line during his long solo — and on “Let’s Fall in Love,” pianist Levine was especially bright. The “Baghdad Cafe” film score included “Calling You,” which Eastman delivered impeccably at Yoshi’s (it’s also on the CD); and “Wild I the Wind,” Ned Washington’s number from 1957, was especially well received on Thursday. In each case, Eastman’s working with and within the ensemble lines adds great enhancement of the overall expression.—

“Jazz Singer Displays Imagination, Verve” -Terry Perkins

Madeline Eastman is one of those singers whose talent seems to sneak up on you. Her opening set Wednesday night at Just Jazz in the Hotel Majestic is a case in point. Backed by a trio of St. Louis musicians — pianist Kim Portnoy, bass player Dave Engleley and drummer Steve Ungar — Eastman sailed smoothly through versions of “Star Eyes” and “Gypsy in My Soul” to open the set, exhibiting a warm tone, smooth phrasing and a talent for scat singing, as well. In short, Eastman was clearly a talented vocalist, obviously knew plenty about music, and knew her way around the stage. But there wasn’t anything in her performance that really set her apart from lots of other professional singers. Nothing, that is, until she sang her third song of the set, “You Are My Sunshine.” Now this traditional tune has been twisted and pulled in any number of ways by singers of every category from country and pop to soul and jazz. But Eastman clearly put her stamp on the tune, slowing it down considerably and adding an ironic twist to the lyrics. The only version I can compare it to in terms of power and effectiveness is that turned in by singer/pianist Most Allison, who’s also been known to add plenty of irony and nuance to a standard. Eastman showed plenty of imagination in her other song choices during her opening set, and showcased her wide-ranging talent as well. She ripped through a version of the Sonny Rollins bop standard, “Pent-up House” that featured high speed “vocalese” lyrics in the Lambert, Hendricks and Ross tradition. She put her personal stamp on show tunes like “The Boy Next Door” and performed “Nothing but the Blues” with energetic verve. Portnoy’s work on the keyboard was a fine complement to Eastman’s vocal prowess. He’s appeared frequently at Just Jazz as both a backing musician and a featured performer, and he has an instinctive ability to add just the right musical touch at the right time.—



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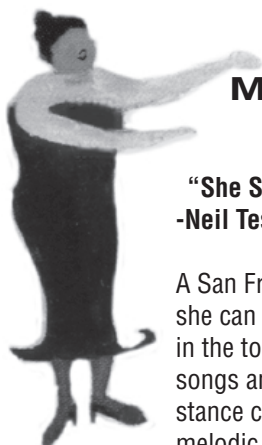
"Vocalist Brings Rare Gift To Jazz" **-Daniel Gewertz**

Madeline Eastman has lately joined a very exclusive club: modern jazz vocalists with something fresh to say about delivering a lyric. The lithe San Franciscan singer puts a contemporary spin on vocal jazz, yet it's her attitude that makes her so '90s, not her technique. Eastman is hip without pretension. She's cool without alienation. She's unsentimental, but never hard. At Scullers last night, love songs like "My Heart Stood Still" and "Star Eyes" were bopped out with upbeat brashness and a horn-like tone. Her ballads were spare and sultry, even when dealing with corrosive end-of-an affair gloom "Bilhete. "She's too off-hand and goofy between songs to be thought of as a diva, and she doesn't drench her act in romance.

Singing with an agile trio led by pianist Allen Farnham, Eastman ranged from a fleet bebopper based on Sonny Rollins' "Pent-Up House," to the old Gov. Jimmy Davis war-horse "You Are My Sunshine. "Sunshine" was audacious. Hesitant and way behind the beat, this normally cheery ditty was turned inward and ruminative. It's as if the sunny thoughts are being recalled from a shadowy present. The words "please don't take my sunshine away" become the song's center and the whole thing turns scary and vulnerable. On "Nothin' But the Blues," Eastman was smack dab on the beat, with an easy sexiness. During a supple bass solo, she chose to scat in a light, funny way: quite a quirky choice, but she pulled it off. Eastman has wit and warmth, a rare jazz gift in the '90s.—

"Lady Sings The Muse" **-Zan Stewart**

When she was 19, Madeline Eastman thought, "Well, maybe I'll be a jazz singer. "Singing might be a lark; that was the way Eastman saw it then. Now she knows what a major commitment singing is. "It's a lifetime of work, if you're serious about it. And I am . . . deadly serious. "Asked why she's so devoted to her craft, the vocalist, who appears Thursday at Legends of Hollywood, rattles off a list of affectionate reasons with the same speed and spirit she might use to handle a jack rabbit up-tempo tune from her recent "Art Attack" CD. "I love to sing, the art form of singing," she begins in a phone conversation from her home in San Francisco, where she lives with her husband, the noted drummer Vince Lateano. "I love to express myself. Singing taps into every part of my being: my intellect, my artistic side. "You have to be really smart, because you're creating on the spot, flying by the seat of your pants, making something beautiful. Singing is very worldly. You end up playing and interacting with people that you never would, both musicians and audience members. It leaves no stone unturned. It's a rush. Not just jazz but the lifestyle that goes along with it appeals to Eastman. In the past two years, she has been going beyond the clubs in her native San Francisco, where she has established a solid home base, to work such top U.S. jazz rooms as the Blue Note in New York, Blues Alley in Washington, D.C., Scullers in Boston and Jazz Alley in Seattle. "I love being around creative people and being involved with something where the learning process is unending," she says. "No matter how good you get, there's more to learn. I feel stimulated every day by music. "Even the business side of jazz has given Eastman a charge, except "when I've had to grovel," she says, adding one of her throaty, distinctive laughs. And while she says it's been fun to map out a career, understanding how to get from one stage to another, she's ready for a manager. "I book myself, for the most part, and it's getting tiresome," she says. "It takes so much energy to do the business side. I wish I could just sing and let somebody else do it. "At Legends, where she'll appear with pianist Tom Garvin, bassist Tom Warrington and Lateano on drums, she'll offer tunes from her three self-produced albums on Mad-Kat records, a label she owns with fellow-San Francisco Bay Area singer Kitty Margolis. Among her potential selections are a jaunty version of "Gypsy in My Soul," Thelonious Monk's "Evidence," to which she's written lyrics, and classic pop standards such as "My Heart Stood Still. "Eastman says her method of delivering a song's meaning is to get inside it. "First of all, I really think about what I sing before I sing it," she says. "Basically, my forte is communicating the lyrics. It boils down to how you phrase a song so it's believable or not believable. It's about allowing yourself to be intimate with a song, stripping it down to its emotional core, not using a bunch of fancy singer tricks. "In this area, I'm a big fan of the late Carmen McRae's. She's the ultimate interpreter of lyrics. Her phrasing is so hip. She groups words together so they make sense, rather than being strictly true to what's written on the page. Therefore, there's a freedom in her singing—that's a joy to listen to. "Many fans and critics feel the same way about Eastman. One is Boston-based writer Fred Bouchard, who, in the January issue of CD Review magazine, reviewing "Art Attack," said, "Eastman's songs are far from broke, but she fixes them anyway with a savvy alto and a sharp rethinking. "Eastman calls herself a jazz singer not because she scats, but because she improvises with the lyrics. "I'll take a second chorus, using the words but changing the melody under them, changing the rhythm," she says. A self-described "work in progress," Eastman says she's a much better singer now than ever before, mainly because she can really enjoy what she's doing. "I used to have terrible stage fright. I had to sing with my eyes closed," she says. "But about seven years ago, though singing was just as important to me as ever, I learned to lighten up and enjoy the experience of it. that was a major breakthrough. I could sort of open up and put the music out there instead of having the feeling be internal. It was because I was getting older. Age and experience made the difference."—



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“She Sings For Adults, And Makes You Glad To Be One” -Neil Tesser

A San Francisco treat: vocalist Madeline Eastman rides out of the west to make her Chicago debut. She always swings and she can scat well enough; but while that alone would seem the goal for many singers, Eastman's greater contribution lies in the tough, contemporary edge she brings to her music. Her naturalistic and unsentimental style lends many of her songs an intriguing, ironic distance: I find it a bit discomfiting, and wholly appropriate to the time in which we live. This stance comes from her actual vocal timbre—worldly and tart, with a slightly flattened affect—and from her off-kilter melodic displacements. And her phrasing, with urgent ahead-of-the-beat glides and the down-swooping inflection with which she often ends a phrase, recalls the Chicago saxophone tradition that encompasses Gene Ammons, Von Freeman, and Eddie Harris. None of this should suggest a lack of passion, because Eastman brings plenty of punch to her music—it's just that she refuses to confuse real-world delights with rose-colored romance. In other words, on even love songs and bebop ditties, she sings for adults; she even makes you glad to be one.—

“Singer and Choir Make Jazzy Magic” -Wayne Saroyan

Sometimes the simplest pleasures in life bring the greatest joys. Sunday night, after a frantic weekend spent racing from one gig to another - three nights of Grand Opening performances at Yoshi's Nitespot, six hundred different stages at the Black & White Ball, and somehow managing to cook a Mother's Day dinner in the midst of all this musical madness - I sidled over to the Great American Music Hall in San Francisco to give a listen to what jazz singer Madeline Eastman's been up to lately. I've been a big fan of Mad's singing since her Monterey Jazz Festival debut back in 1990. Her reading of the hauntingly beautiful Bill Evans ballad, “Turn Out the Stars,” still remains a highlight of that weekend seven years ago. A few weeks after Mad's Monterey engagement, I discovered that she and I were neighbors up on Potrero Hill in San Francisco, and we've had the chance to hang out from time to time over the years. And it's been nothing short of phenomenal to watch as she's grown and matured as an artist and a singer, stretching the boundaries of her own creative expression while remaining deeply committed to the local jazz community: teaching at the Summer Jazz Camp, running various vocal jazz workshops, booking talent for the lavish Filoli estate concert series on the Peninsula, and running her own record label, MadKat Records, along with fellow San Francisco jazz diva Kitty Margolis. All this, plus designing and managing her own award-winning Web site (www.madelineeastman.com). Just keeping track of Madeline's current adventures can be exhausting; there aren't enough hours in the day. So, with weary feet and a frazzled nervous system, I opted to keep my notebook closed and just settle back to listen at Mad's Sunday night performance with the 50-voice Oakland Jazz Choir, under the graceful direction of Greg Murai. Calm the critical voice inside my head, so to speak, and just enjoy. For the next 80 minutes or so, I floated along on a silvery cloud of 51 voices and 51 luminous smiles, all totally digging the music they were making together. Lucky for us that there's not a law against so many people on stage having so much fun; all 50 members of the Jazz Choir were bopping in time to the music, beaming with smiles bright enough to illuminate the entire room. This is one happy choir. After three showcase tunes from the choir, Eastman stepped onto the crowded stage for a glorious, inspirational version of “The Creator Has A Master Plan,” undulating with hypnotic, spellbinding rhythms. Romping through the tongue-twisting turns and tumbles of Thelonious Monk's “I Mean You” (with lyrics courtesy of scatmaster Jon Hendricks), Eastman strutted her impressive improv chops and her sly, playful onstage persona. Eastman can charm even the stodgiest of audiences with her quirky, offbeat sense of humor and “What Am I Doing Up Here?” kind of goofiness, but she's also one classy lady. Case in point: a sparkling new arrangement of “Calling You,” the “Baghdad Cafe” theme that Mad recorded on her first album. Sunday night, she encased the soaring ballad inside a framework of poetic lyrics from the brilliant, eclectic songwriter Tom Waits. You could hear overtones of “Calling You” quietly building among the musicians - pianist Jennifer Clevinger, bassist David Belove, and drummer Dave Rokeach - but the moment of revelation was stunning nonetheless. Along with arrangements of a Billy Joel tune, “And So It Goes,” a handful of Brazilian melodies from the great songwriter Ivan Lins, and a seriously funky take on the Charles Wright and the 103rd Street Rhythm Band classic, “Express Yourself,” Eastman and friends delivered a magnificent night of music that was well worth the trip. ■