



L.A. JAZZ SCENE - April 2008

Susan Krebs' *Jazz Aviary*
Giannelli Square, March 27, 2008

Jazz vocalist Susan Krebs has conceived and performed a thoroughly unique show that is innovative, mind stretching, and simply beautiful!

...This is an astounding production that must be experienced to be felt and understood. It is a multi-senses feast that you will long remember, extremely well done by caring musicians and technicians, daring to be experimental in their art and dedicated to a new captivating result. But then isn't that what jazz musicians have always done?



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Susan Krebs' Jazz Aviary
@ Giannelli Square

Vocalist Susan Krebs is a very creative woman, so it was not enough to have a band member introduce her and to just begin singing. No, first she transformed the cozy Giannelli Square Theater into a large, active aviary, with a large photo of a tree and birds projected against the stage wall. Song birds could be heard on the speakers throughout the afternoon's performance.

The excellent sextet: Rich Eames/piano, Larry Koonse/guitar, Rob Lackart/Sax Flute, drummer Jerry Kalaf, MB Gordy on percussion and bassist Tim Emmons warmed up the room with a bluesy "High Flyin' Bird" and a lovely "Song of the Birds". Krebs walked into the theater and recited poems about birds and aphorisms from philosophers such as Henry Thoreau. It was clear that she has given her topic a lot of thought and was going to educate as well as entertain. She then sang "Bird Alone" written by Abbey Lincoln, arranged by Eames. Her voice is expressive and unfussy. With such interesting material, presented so well, there is no need for belt 'em-out the ballpark show stoppers. "Songbird" was deceptively simple with Krebs' soft voice and Koonse giving her gentle accompaniment. Krebs looked totally relaxed and surely she has rehearsed and performed this program many times, to get it so seamlessly perfect.

Why do birds sing? They sing when they're wooing, courting, defending and simply communicating their presence in the world. For "Bob White", Krebs' voice was deeper and more assertive. It was a busy tune, with Gordy's percussion and Lockart's nicely focused sax solo as it all came to a flashy finish. "Baltimore Oriole" was a new song to me. Krebs sang in a dramatic, slower style. The tune was a lament, in which the birds became the metaphor for humans. Lockart's sax was very sexy, in a film noir-ish way, for a poignant presentation. Dave Brubeck's "Strange Meadowlark" was fascinating as Eames' melodic piano passages recalled a Brubeck aura. Krebs adjusted her dynamics for a dramatic close. The "Lark Ascending" was written by Ralph Vaughan Williams, arranged by Kalaf. It was a gorgeous piece and Krebs gave the stage over to the musicians, who performed with restraint so a beautiful, peaceful tune could emerge. Lockart's flute worked the melody, while the others embellished the delicate notes. Kalaf, Emmons and Gordy were extremely sensitive to the mood. "A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square" was given a swiny, samba-ish flair and here I was expecting a somber ballad. Silly me. Lockart's flute was lilting, Koonse's guitar buoyant and saucy.

After an intermission with refreshments served in the lobby area, Set 2 began with the musicians romping through Charlie Parker's "Ornithology". Emmons took the first solo, creating a mini portrait with his bass. Koonse used a very bright tone and Lockart's tenor was rousing. After letting loose in full force, they all stopped on a dime. Marvelous! "Zipadee Do Dah" was almost simply spoken by Krebs. Lennon & McCartney's "Blackbird" sounded like an ancient tune; hard to believe it's a contemporary tune, as Krebs gave it a dramatic reading as she closed the tune softly. Gordy began "Bird in the Rain" with exotic percussion instruments – shakers, a rain stick and then congas and Eames' piano added more drama as Krebs sang. It's not surprising that she is also an actress. She uses her voice with great facility, always in focus with the story she's telling. It's all very hypnotic and quite wonderful. "Skylark" must surely be one of the prettiest songs ever written. Krebs' interpretation was delicate and deliberate. "Song of the Birds" featured improvised vocalizing to end a fascinating program. As Krebs stated in closing, "May you always hear the birds sing!"

This was one of the most refreshing, interesting, stimulating shows I've ever attended. Giannelli Square was the perfect location for this multi-media presentation. Inside the cool and cozy theater, I did nothing but think about birds and darn if I didn't pay more attention to the birds around my house for the next week or so! Krebs and her amazing musicians created something of singular beauty. - **Myrna Daniels**