

Cat Conner

Jazz Times

Cat Tales is at once an overdue welcome and a sad farewell. Cat Conner, a multidisciplinary performer whose talents include not just jazz singing but also performance art, body art and mediumship, has been a mainstay on the L.A. scene for more than three decades, yet she only recently made her recording debut. To shape *Cat Tales*, the caramel-voiced Conner called upon George Mesterhazy. His dual role as co-producer and pianist—abetted on several tracks by two of L.A.'s finest session players, reedman Gene Cipriano and bassist Jim Hughart—turned out to be one of his final studio gigs, completed not long before his premature demise, at age 49, in April.

Among vocal accompanists, Mesterhazy rivaled the great Mike Renzi. His work with Rebecca Parris and Paula West, among many others, stands as sterling testament to his skills, as does this elegant session with Conner. She is, much like Parris, a prima balladeer, as demonstrated across seven of the album's nine tracks. Reaching back more than a century, she opens with a molasses-slow "Hello Ma Baby." Her splendidly unhurried pace, shaping a pearl of each word, continues through buttery readings of "I Want to Talk About You," "If You Could See Me Now," "Embraceable You," "I Hear a Rhapsody" and a heartbreakingly tender "Some Other Time." But *Cat Tales'* tour de force (and its lone track without Mesterhazy) is a dark, sultry "Caravan" defined by swirling Arabian breezes courtesy of Cipriano's clarinet. — Christopher Loudon

All About Jazz

Of these four songs, the most revelatory is Conner's and Mesterhazy's treatment of "If You Could See Me Now." Again, the song is slowed to the point where its subatomic compositional mechanics can be nakedly seen. Conner delivers the lament languidly with a relaxed intent, one with equal amounts of regret and gratitude. She exercises all sub-ranges of her sturdy and muscular alto voice, singing with perfect poise and delivery. Conner is a student of the song rather than its melodic interpretation. — C. Michael Bailey

Jazz Scene, Jazz Society of Oregon

Conner is simply a natural. No gimmicks, no show biz, no schmaltz, no frosting. There's a direct sincerity in the way she tells the stories of these lyrics. Few can attain it, and you know it when you hear it. Conner is the understated real deal. — George Fendel

Los Angeles Jazz Scene

The sparse setting is perfect for Cat for her voice is strong and very attractive, her long tones are appealing, and she knows how to make each note and sound count. She particularly excels on ballads, gives the ancient standard "Hello Ma Baby" a surprisingly sensuous treatment, and swings at every tempo. — Scott Yanow

All About Jazz

Lustrous, pleasing voice, crystal-clear articulation: check. Deep-rooted feeling for jazz, ability to swing: check. Perceptive choice of material, respect for a lyric: check. World-class sidemen who always place her interests ahead of their own: check. Splendid sound quality that favors everyone involved: check... This is an impressive debut for a singer who should be much better known. — Jack Bowers

Jersey Jazz Journal

Each track is wonderfully conceived, with Cipriano and Mesterhazy providing many magic moments. Listen to Conner and Cipriano give a fascinating ride to "Caravan," with Cipriano on bass oboe and Conner supplying the rhythm with a shaker. Close your eyes and you can see the desert. Welcome to the world of recording Cat Conner! — Joe Lang

O's Place Jazz Magazine

O's Notes: Cat Conner sings Cat Tales, a sultry set of romantic ballads backed by minimalist accompaniment. The music has a jazzy feel with ragtime elements especially from George Mesterhazy (p) and Gene Cipriano (sax, cl, oboe). Jim Hughart (b) shines with Cat on "In A Mellow Tone" walking his bass alongside before Gene and George join in. Cat's voice is rich and pure, a delight on these covers, all studio first takes! She's been singing for over 30 years and this is her solo recording debut. We welcome another! —D. Oscar Groomes