



A Surprising Twist: Lua Hadar Blasts Through the Boundaries With Her New Band

Written by Nancy Tierney

Thursday, 25 October 2007

http://www.cabaretexchange.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=207&Itemid=84



LUA HADAR

Lua Hadar and her new band, Twist, transformed the Octavia Lounge in San Francisco into a rollicking European nightclub last Thursday, Oct. 18, as they filled the air with latin-flavored arrangements of both familiar and obscure Italian and French songs, rhythmically daring versions of American Songbook standards and show tunes, heart-breaking ballads and a jazz waltz every now and then.

Now, I'd been hearing buzz about Lua Hadar's new band Twist long before I went to hear her three-set show at Octavia's, so I thought I was well prepared for an evening with international flair, latin rhythms and Hadar's talent for bringing songs of other countries to life. But I wasn't prepared for three full sets of so many musical and vocal surprises.

As the band Twist, led by pianist, composer and arranger Jason Martineau, launched into their opening instrumental number, it was clear that this was going to be a high-energy show of extraordinary jazz musicianship. But when Hadar took the stage in her neon-green party dress and started singing "Soon It's Gonna Rain" in a heady, effortless soprano, and thought, "Whaaa? Where are we going here?" And that question became my mantra for the entire evening. For no sooner had I asked that question when Hadar and Twist drove that tune into a double-time samba.

And the surprises just kept coming. Hadar and Twist do indeed "twist" familiar tunes from the American Songbook and musical theater into internationally-flavored, latin-rhythmed arrangements, sometimes jumping genres and styles within a song. They also introduce gorgeous, rarely performed Italian and French songs, such as achingly beautiful "In Qualche Parte del Mondo" by Luigi Tenco, only to jolt the audience into "La Vie En Rose" performed as a cha-cha. A Beatles' ballad "And I Love Her" becomes a bossa nova, and Kurt Weill's "This is New" gets pushed into a samba.

But the real twist in this ensemble is Hadar herself. Her vocal diversity, range and unique sound allow her to leap from a lilting, operetta-like tone, as she did with the opening number "Soon It's Gonna Rain" only to plunge into a dark, earthy

brashness for “C’est Si Bon,” (sung in French, of course) soar into full voice for “Vorre!” and then straighten it out for a fast swing on “This Can’t Be Love.” It’s Hadar that does the majority of the shape-shifting to bring such a diversity of style and genre to life.

Without a doubt, she’s at her best when interpreting those great Italian and French songs. Few have sung them better. From her gregarious, salsa-esque version of “Quando, Quando, Quando?” (Michael Buble, you should take notes) to the heart-breaking beauty of “Il Tempo Passó,” Hadar brings such passion and intensity to these tunes that you feel as if you understand every word, even if you don’t know a lick of Italian. Even when singing in English, she has a European sensibility in both her presence and sound (even though she’s really a Jewish girl from New York) that strengthens the overall cross-continental essence she is creating with Twist.



Because I’m familiar with Hadar’s past incarnations as a cabaret artist, I wasn’t surprised by her fun and flirty way with her audience, her exuberance and sense of fun when she’s interacting with her band, and ability to sing to the audience with a revealing intimacy or sense of play. Yet in this performance there were moments when the emotional essence of the song got run over by either the fast pace of the rhythms or the newness of these arrangements. It was as if Hadar didn’t get a chance to drop into the heart of the song but had to run to keep up with all the musical twist and turns. This is something that is sure to be worked out as this new band continues to grow and play together.

Twist is a first-rate 5-piece ensemble that knows how to rock the casbah. Dr, Martineau, as Hadar refers to him, plays and directs with a contained passion and musical impeccability that beautifully compliments the sexy saxophone playing of Tony Malfatti. Although bassist Mario Suracci didn’t get many chances to show off in this show, you know he is one of the pillars of this band. Drummer Randy Odell and Latin percussionist Jacob Lawlor both played starring roles in a show driven by eclectic rhythms, but neither of them were given adequate solos or opportunities to really show off their talent.

The other star of the show was the venue. The Octavia’s Lounge. It had been a while since I’d been there and I was grateful to see how the owners have done a fine job of creating a showcase for the music while not sacrificing the quality of the food (my pasta puttanesca was delicious) or service (our server Elizabeth was attentive yet always respectful of the fact there was a show going on).

It’s obvious that Hadar and her new “Twist” are having a great time creating something daring and unique in style, sound and genre, and it is exciting to hear a show in which you never know what is coming next but it’s sure to have you either bouncing in your chair, misty-eyed, or wonder-struck by how a song in a foreign language can speak so clearly to your own heart. Lua Hadar and Twist take this show to the M Bar Supper Club in Hollywood, CA, on Sunday, Oct. 28. For more information and future show dates, go to <http://www.luahadar.com>.