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A new beat for the Bard

Quintet takes the 'A' Train to Stratford-upon-Avon

by Judy Woodward

What do lovers of Shakespeare and classical jazz have in common? For starters, their pleasure comes from hearing "different interpretations of known works," according to singer Christine Rosholt. Whether it's a new staging of *Hamlet* or the phrasing that Rosholt brings to a Cole Porter tune, the emphasis is on making the familiar fresh again, she says.

Rosholt's theory will be tested next week when the Highland Park singer leads a jazz quartet in a performance of Shakespeare's songs and poems. The program "Take All My Loves" will be performed at 8:00 p.m. Friday, February 18, in the Concert Hall of Macalester College's Fine Arts Center. Joining Rosholt will be pianist Laura Caviani, drummer Jay Epstein, bassist Michael O'Brien and saxophonist Pete Whitman.

No, you won't see any sackbutts, lutes, krummhorns or clavichords at this concert. And if you go, set aside the notion that "Who is Sylvia?" should be sung by an earnest tenor to the music of Schubert. In the hands of Rosholt and her combo, Shakespeare swings.

The program includes 16 bright and witty numbers composed by John Dankworth and other jazz greats like Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn.

"Shakespeare's songs and poems set up an interesting dynamic," says

Rosholt, 40. "The rhyming and wordplay are exciting for jazz musicians."

Rosholt's favorite song in the program is "Sigh No More, Ladies." In Shakespeare's comedy *Much Ado About Nothing*, the song is a rueful acknowledgement of the fickle nature of men. The same theme can be found in jazz compositions, though it's rarely expressed to a chorus of "Hey, nonny nonny."

Macalester College Professor Theresa Krier said she enjoys the "wit and flash that result when two such distant time periods are talking. Jazz is witty and has a great capacity for lyricism, and Shakespeare's lyrics lend themselves to that combination."

Rosholt is also drawn to the Shakespearean sonnet that gives the program its title. In the jazz version, Sonnet 40's "Take all my loves, my love, yea, take them all" is expressed in vocal leaps and head-first dives into intricate rhythms. "It's fun, like Cole Porter's wordplay," Rosholt says.

The idea for marrying jazz and Shakespeare originated with Professor Theresa Krier of Macalester's English Department.



Christine Rosholt croons during a recent gig. Photo by Brad Stauffer.

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"Take All My Loves" is just one in a series of musical performances based on Shakespearean texts that are being produced this year with a grant from the Associated Colleges of the Twin Cities. Another concert in the series will be presented on April 23 at Augsburg College. There, the Rose Ensemble will present a more traditional evening of music from Shakespeare's time.

When asked how Shakespeare might have reacted to his sonnets being performed to a sax and bass accompaniment, Krier is emphatic. "He would have loved it," she says. "Shakespeare loved hybrid forms of art. He loved mixing things up."

After hearing Rosholt in concert at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Krier asked her to take part in the Shakespeare project. "I like

Christine's vocal range and her ability to put across a lyric," Krier says, "and she is open to new and creative approaches."

"Learning the music was hard work," Rosholt says. "It's complicated. But of all the musicians I know, Laura, Pete, Mike and Jay were the most appropriate."

"I'm not a Shakespeare person," Rosholt says. "I've never really studied him before." However, she has been performing since age 7 when, in the title role of *Joseph & the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, she wowed an audience at Bethlehem Lutheran Church in South Minneapolis. "None of the boys could sing" is her explanation for how she landed the part. "Besides, I had a short little pixie haircut."

Although Rosholt has always focused on the arts, it is only in the last few years that she has devoted her talents exclusively to jazz singing. After earning a fine arts degree at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, she got a job

with Minneapolis' Children's Theatre Company and worked for several years as a professional photographer.

After she returned to the Twin Cities for good in 2000, she started performing with a comic country-and-western singer named Dixie Cups. "I was supposed to be the on-stage cousin who sings jazz," she says. "It was a city mouse/country mouse kind of thing."

In this case, the city mouse got hooked. "I discovered how much I loved jazz," she says. "I wanted to do it for real."

A long list of serious jazz gigs followed, but none more unusual than the upcoming concert. "Life is about discovering new things," Rosholt says. "This is lively, fun music. I hope it helps to make Shakespeare more fun, more accessible for people."

Admission to "Take All My Loves" is free, but tickets are required. For reservations, contact Krier at 651-696-6810 or Krier@Macalester.edu.