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By JOHN TOOGOOD JAZZ REVIEW

**Suzanne Mellard** has to be one of the most talented, but rarely heard Jazz Vocalists in the UK at the moment, and how lucky we were to have the opportunity to hear her perform at Commuter Jazz last Friday. Diminutive in size but oozing talent, she has impeccable credentials, having worked with the likes of Dave O’Higgins, Darius Brubeck and Sir John Dankworth at his Stables Venue in Wavendon.

Mixing a good cross section of Jazz standards with some show tunes, gave her and the backing trio of Jason Ashworth (Keyboard) Warren Jolly (Bass) and Andy Ferguson (Drums) an ideal opportunity to impress the Zing Bar Jazz aficionados of their quality, which they did in abundance, during their two hour set.

The first number to catch my attention was Stanley Styne’s evergreen This Is The End Of A Beautiful Friendship, immortalised by Americas ‘First Lady Of Song’ Ella Fitzgerald. Regarded by some as the best masterpiece ever recorded in music, it featured a fine Bass solo from Warren. This was followed, a couple of numbers later by Easy Living, and featured an excellent keyboard solo from the very underrated Jason from Lincoln.

Messes Lerner and Lowe conceived the Musical Brigadoon in 1947 and Suzanne’s rendering of the hit song from the show Almost Like Being In Love, included a scat break, which you would not hear in the show! In the second set, a song from an earlier musical that first saw the light of day in 1928 followed this number. Composed by Sigmund Romberg, New Moon was a light operetta of the period and contained a number that has become part of the repertoire of many female singers, the haunting Softly (as in a Morning Sunrise), which featured scintillating solos from all members of the Quartet.

Ms. Mellard took a well-earned break and left the trio on their own to play the funky blues classic Now’s The Time composed by Charlie Parker. Yard bird or just Bird as he is affectionately known, is widely recognised as the leading figure in the development of Bebop Jazz and the trio did not let him down with Mr. Ashworth outstanding on keyboard.

I was introduced to a new number to close the show in the form of Nostalgia In Time Square by Charlie Mingus which research show was originally recorded in 1959, but not released until after his death in 1979. Suzanne performed this rarely heard vocal with passion and feeling which contrasted with Charlie’s nickname of The Angry Man of Jazz who played hard bop and drew heavily on black gospel music.

The whole concert was a huge triumph for those of us who heard them perform for the first time and I recommend that you make every effort to catch them, and see them live whenever you have the opportunity, as Suzanne Mellard is a name to watch out for. I guarantee that any Jazz Lover will not be disappointed.