



Ascendant Singer Alexa Flourishes at Jazz Standard

Though vocalist Thana Alexa is young and chic and possesses an electric stage presence, she's also a warm-hearted chanteuse with old-school charm.

At the Jazz Standard this past week, Alexa greeted friends and strangers alike with her trademark warmth. There is no distance between artist and audience, nor between Alexa, her band and her music. It was as if she'd invited the audience into her home; her heartfelt presence infused every song in her 90-minute set.

Performing material from her 2015 album, *Ode To Heroes* (Harmonia Mundi/Jazz Village), Alexa's collaborators included her husband/drummer Antonio Sanchez, pianist Kevin Hays, tenor saxophonist Ben Flocks and acoustic bassist Noam Wiesenberg.

Fresh from their seemingly never-ending world tour, the Thana Alexa Project performed with a degree of precision rare for a New York City jazz venue, where musicians can tend to focus on reading charts over pure improvisation. This cohesion gave Alexa's band tremendous energy, which they needed for the opening song, the vocalist's arrangement of the Dave Brubeck Quartet classic "Take Five."

Scatting ferociously over her group's rapid-fire delivery, Alexa recast "Take Five" as an organic vehicle on par with Chick Corea's "Spain." Her purring, growling, soulful scatting and vocalese recalled a familiar Corea accomplice, Flora Purim. Sanchez's meticulous drum figures burned at micro-dynamic volume levels like water simmering but never boiling over.

In "Take Five" as in every song of the evening, Alexa gave as much space to her soloists as to herself. Hays, who is new to the group, played beautifully throughout the set, whether performing a sparse solo with spectral chords, or matching Alexa's vocalese with cascading interplay.

Alexa's arrangement of Wayne Shorter's "Footprints," rebranded "Trace Back Your Footprints," added lyrics to the dreamlike melody performed in 6/4. Copious solos from Flocks and Sanchez followed, with Alexa singing funky lines and Sanchez contributing drum punctuations that were anything but polite.