

JUDY BAILEY TRANSFIXES AUDIENCE

by Gilbert Haisman*

[This review of Judy Bailey's performance at the Concert Chamber, appeared in the Wellington, New Zealand, newspaper, The Evening Post, on Wednesday, February 7, 1996 in the Arts/Theatre/Music section.]



Judy Bailey: a wonderful harmonic sense, a great gift for interpretation, and a compelling dramatic instinct... PHOTO CREDIT BRANCO GAICA

Judy Bailey could play *Fur Elise*, *Brahms's Lullaby* and *Humoresque* if she was a classical pianist and win over hardened New York critics. She almost did the jazz equivalent in this solo concert of standard themes, some of them in medleys, from leading pianist-composers that ranged from Joplin to Corea.

And more than got away with it.

Judy Bailey has a wonderful harmonic sense, a great gift for interpretation, and a compelling dramatic instinct. There were many moments when these strengths so transfixed the audience that even the most insensitive pin would not have dared to drop.

** Gilbert Haisman is a pianist, writer and entertainer, available for gigs and wordsmith contracts. His first love is performing solo and for singers, silent movies and shows, in theatre settings, concerts and clubs.*

She started with surefire material. Any reasonably accomplished pianist can do short versions of those wonderfully well-crafted ragtime and early stride pieces, and charm an audience.

Then came the Ellington songs. She found a beauty and strength in these — even in the slight *Satin Doll* — that would convince anyone that this was music to be reckoned with.



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Putting Monk tunes into a medley would normally be sacrilege. Bailey, however, with the help of the world's most perfectly placed, perfectly voiced and delicately played harmonies, wove *Blue Monk*, *Round Midnight* and a surprisingly earthy *I Mean You* into a satisfying whole.



Bailey: her dynamics can be exquisite and utterly seductive... PHOTO COURTESY AUSTRALIAN JAZZ REAL BOOK

A considerable part of Bailey's talent is dramatic; her dynamics can be exquisite and utterly seductive. This is certainly more than fine by me, but I detected, or thought I did, a trace of the tension that can be part and parcel of musical drama, but may also undermine the unforced flow of improvisation. By the second half I was ready for some pure music.

Bailey obliged with some straight-ahead Horace Silver, complete with bubbly contrapuntal lines, and the calm and beautiful simplicity of John Lewis. This was followed by some gorgeous Dave Brubeck, a bluesy *Moanin'*, a fine *Little Niles*, and a slightly hotel lounge-y *Wave*.

The concert finished with themes by Evans, Jarrett, Hancock and Corea. Each had brilliant song-like improvised lines, was a gem of creative musicmaking and should have been recorded for a time capsule.

The encore was a gentle, introspective original and the audience trotted off, buzzing happily about how wonderful she was.