

Guest Artist Recital

2013-14 Season
520th Concert

Friday 21 March 2014
Dalton Center Recital Hall
8:00 p.m.

SARA GAZAREK, Vocals
JOSH NELSON, Piano

Program to be announced from the stage.

Amongst a community teeming with startlingly gifted young singers, SARA GAZAREK stands out as a particularly extravagant artist. Her first two albums introduced her singular sound and vision, steeped in the tradition of jazz but deeply informed by contemporary songwriters and performers. With *Blossom & Bee*, her highly anticipated debut release on the respected indie label Palmetto, Gazarek turns over an exciting, glistening new leaf. With five years between her acclaimed 2007 album *Return to You* (Native Language) and *Blossom & Bee*, it's no surprise that Gazarek has grown considerably in the meantime. Working closely with the brilliant pianist/organist Larry Goldings, who produced the album, Gazarek and her band have crafted a program of emotionally expansive standards, inspired contemporary fare, and uncommonly memorable originals, all delivered with her insouciant sense of artistry.

As the title track might suggest, an undeniable thread running through *Blossom & Bee* is the irrepressibly buoyant spirit of jazz pianist, singer and songwriter Blossom Dearie. "When I looked at the 4 or 5 songs from our book that absolutely had to be on this record, I was surprised to realize they had all been inadvertently added to our repertoire over the years through our love for her." From the upbeat and humorous *Everything I've Got*, their refreshing, glockenspiel laden take on *I'm Old Fashioned* and the meter-shifting *Tea For Two*, Gazarek acknowledges the direct correlation between these songs and Dearie's.

But, rather than a tribute project, *Blossom & Bee* is meant to reflect the working repertoire of Gazarek's stellar Los Angeles based group, featuring pianist Josh Nelson, bassist Hamilton Price and drummer Zach Harmon. "We are so excited to finally be able to share something with our listeners that encapsulates the energy, humor, and sheer joy we feel in our live performances," Gazarek states.



Born and raised in Seattle, Gazarek grew up without much exposure to jazz. In her early teens she was inspired by musical theater and dance, but she ended up discovering and falling in love with the jazz choir at her high school. The director, Scott Brown, became the first of several essential musical mentors, and he started steering her towards great jazz singers/musicians and classic jazz recordings.

When Gazarek arrived at the University of Southern California (where she is now on faculty in the Jazz Studies department), she was the only jazz studies vocal major in her class, and studied privately with vocalists Tierney Sutton and Carmen Bradford, pianist Shelly Berg and bassist/arranger John Clayton, who became one of her most important champions.

By 2003, people outside USC were starting to discover Gazarek. She won the prestigious Downbeat Student Music Award for Outstanding Collegiate Jazz Vocalist, a distinction that directly led to a spot on the Concord Jazz Festival Tour (with Oleta Adams, Karrin Allyson and Diane Schuur). But now, with three highly acclaimed CDs under her belt at the young age of 30, Gazarek is steeped in the jazz tradition, but is not afraid to embrace the music that moves her generation. And with the release of *Blossom & Bee* she is taking her rightful place as an original artist with a sound and concept that will continue to bloom.

JOSH NELSON, born and raised in Southern California, maintains an active and creative schedule as a jazz pianist, composer, teacher, and recording artist. At 32 years old, he has already performed with some of the most respected names in jazz, including Natalie Cole, Anthony Wilson, Bob Hurst, Jeff Hamilton, Ralph Moore, Albert "Tootie" Heath, Seamus Blake, Matt Wilson, Sara Gazarek, Ernie Watts, Jack Sheldon, Tom Scott, Peter Erskine, Abe Laboriel, and Alex Acuna, to name a few. Nelson has recorded for countless albums, films, and TV shows, but also makes time for his own projects: *First Stories* (1998), *Anticipation* (2004) and *Let it Go* (2007, Native Language Music) all garnered international critical claim. Josh's latest album, *I Hear a Rhapsody* (2009), displays Nelson's musings on new original music, standard interpretations, and reinventions of pop tunes.

Compositions and performances of his have appeared on various prime-time and cable shows and films, including *Jack and Bobby*, *The Division*, *Lucky*, and *First Daughter*. He has also worked with film composer Michael Kamen, and actors Eric Idle, Clint Eastwood, and Jon Lovitz. Josh has earned many awards, scholarships, and accolades over the years, some of which include the Louis Armstrong Award and the John Philip Sousa Award. He was also one of 12 semi-finalists in the prestigious 2006 Thelonious Monk International Jazz Piano Competition.

Nelson is also musical director for vocal talent Sara Gazarek, of which he penned the title track of her debut record, *Yours*. That record reached No. 10 on the Billboard Jazz Charts. Gazarek's second studio album, *Return to You* (2006), also featured Nelson's singer/songwriter skills. Currently, Nelson continues his touring with legendary vocalist Natalie Cole. He is also always working on a new CD project, and is just happy to be alive and playing with wonderful musicians!

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