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## CLASSIC JAZZ WITH NO FRILLS OR PREENING

By STEPHEN HOLDEN, May 12, 2007

The jazz singer Karrin Allyson has added a new instrumental ingredient to her music with the introduction into her band of the vibraphonist Steve Nelson. As he swapped solos with the guitarist Rod Fleeman on Thursday's early show at Birdland, where Ms. Allyson is appearing through tonight, his shimmering blues-charged lyricism gave the music a mild percussive kick. It lent songs, several of which are found on her 2006 album, "Footprints" a discreet element of exoticism that suggested a dramatic indigo sky in a painting of a cornfield. (Ms. Allyson is from Kansas City.)



Ms. Allyson swings plainly, without frills, in a voice that's a little bit higher and lighter than that of her rock equivalent, Bonnie Raitt. One of the strongest moments in her set was a rendition of Mose Allison's "Everybody's Cryin' Mercy," which Ms. Raitt recorded years ago. This tough blues-flavored critique of hypocrisy, which includes the aphorism, "Everybody's cryin' peace on earth just as soon as we win this war," is as pertinent as ever.

With Ms. Allyson there is never any nonsense. She doesn't preen, flirt or act coy. What you see and hear is what you get: a musically and psychologically centered gamine, deeply schooled in jazz, who is without neurotic tics and devoid of grandiosity. The songs on "Footprints" are classic jazz instrumentals with lyrics by Chris Caswell that are in tune with the spirit of the music, yet unobtrusive.

Wayne Shorter's eloquent jazz meditation "Footprints," which he performed, is especially impressive in the way its circular musical logic is attached to the notion of finding your way forward by following your footprints back. In her reverent approach, Ms. Allyson and her band, which was rounded out by Doug Weiss on bass and Todd Strait on drums, blended the new and old with poise and verve.

"Say It (Over and Over Again)," from her album "Ballads," a tribute to John Coltrane's album of the same name, had a similar sense of large emotional forces under control but not suppressed. Its balance, restraint and understatement typified a show of honest, thoughtful musicality.