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MUSIC REVIEW | JOHN PIZZARELLI AND JESSICA MOLASKEY

A Witty Musical Marriage Riding a Wave of Springy Pop-Jazz

By [STEPHEN HOLDEN](#)

From the moment [John Pizzarelli](#) and Jessica Molaskey arrived onstage at [Café Carlyle](#) on Tuesday evening, gravity relaxed its grip, and the room began to bounce. The wittiest, most musically savvy husband-and-wife team in pop-jazz, they transformed the club into a silk-covered magic carpet that floated up and away to screwball heaven.

For Mr. Pizzarelli, the lighter-than-air jazz guitarist and raconteur, the bounce springs from the easy swing and bossa nova pulses of his guitar, which combines the spirit of [Django Reinhardt](#) with the virtuosity of George Benson and [Les Paul](#); his crooning echoes the jivey early Nat King Cole. Mr. Pizzarelli recently released “With a Song in My Heart” (Telarc), the least oratorical album of [Richard Rodgers](#) music ever made. On the record he strokes songs like “This Can’t Be Love” and “It’s Easy to Remember” until they purr.

For Ms. Molaskey, the bounce is in the jazz lilt with which she inflects her theatrical voice into a lightly swinging saloon style. She has just released “A Kiss to Build a Dream On” (Arbors), an album of happy songs that is so buoyant it eliminates any hint of Sunday school sermonizing from the concept of sweetness and light.

Their first show of a two-month engagement spun together material mostly taken from those albums into a running conversation in which many of the songs were paired into dialogues, some cheeky, others serious. The couple were accompanied by Larry Fuller, a pianist whose light touch and velocity match Mr. Pizzarelli’s guitar; Martin Pizzarelli (John’s younger brother) on bass; and Tony Tedesco on drums.

Ms. Molaskey’s wistful version of “I Didn’t Know What Time It Was,” segued to Mr. Pizzarelli’s rendition of “Just in Time.” Her “Will He Like Me?” was answered affirmatively by his “I Have Dreamed.” A string of six songs that Mr. Pizzarelli called the show’s “happiness suite” explored the concept from multiple perspectives, from Norman Vincent Peale (Dorothy Fields and Arthur Schwartz’s “Happy Habit”) to Freud ([Billy Joel](#)’s “Summer, Highland Falls” joined to Antonio Carlos Jobim’s “Meditation”).

Mr. Joel's song describes an articulate couple's inability to alter the destructive pattern of a troubled relationship even after airing all their grievances. The bossa nova setting helped transmute the language of talk therapy into a philosophic inquiry about the effectiveness of communication between two people.

Rodgers and Hammerstein's "You've Got to Be Carefully Taught" and [Stephen Sondheim's](#) "Children Will Listen" was the show's ultimate example of two songs wound together to reinforce each other. That hybrid led into "Heart's Desire," Alan Broadbent and Dave Frishberg's tender jazz ballad advising a child to follow his dreams no matter what and sung by Ms. Molaskey with a piercing sense of recognition:

And soon enough the seasons start to slip away

So seize the day

And if the fates are kind

Then you will find your heart's desire.

John Pizzarelli and Jessica Molaskey appear through Nov. 1 at Café Carlyle, at the Carlyle Hotel, 35 East 76th Street, Manhattan; (212) 744-1600, thecarlyle.com.

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