

Barb Jungr/Ian Shaw

★★★★★ Pizza on the Park, London

John Fordham

Thursday January 18, 2007

[The Guardian](#)

An evening spent with the likes of Mose Allison, Claire Martin or Georgie Fame, is one spent sharing an artist's endless enthusiasm for great 20th century songwriting. At the Pizza on the Park this week, the personable, formidably musical, and casually virtuosic British singers Barb Jungr and Ian Shaw are doing the same thing. The performers go to some lengths to make their art seem artless, and to establish a chatty intimacy, but, however much they make light of their skills, Jungr and Shaw repeatedly startle the room with devoted remakes of American classics that constitute their New York Stories duo show.

The contrast between them is a big part of the magic. Shaw (who also accompanies on the piano) reflects the skidding jazzy melodic audacity of Mark Murphy and the falsetto soulfulness of Stax and Motown vocalists. Jungr's red-hot vibrato and dramatic delivery has a show-singer's timing and lyrical insight. Add some of the most enduring songs created in the era from the Gershwins via Lieber and Stoller to Carole King and Laura Nyro, and it's not hard to figure out why the show goes by in a flash.

Shaw rattles into You Ain't Nothing but a Hound Dog with a venomous glee, before the two explore On Broadway together in exultant harmony. Jungr's glowing tone and the penetrating power of her soft sounds bring the music to a confessional purr on Come Rain or Come Shine, and Shaw's high-note intensity and asymmetrical phrasing cherish the vision of Joni Mitchell, a personal favourite of his, on I Could Drink a Case of You. Jungr unleashes her gospel power on Laura Nyro's Stoney End, and shrewdly develops I'm a Woman from offhand speech to the full declamatory works.

New York Stories is a respectful tribute without an iota of mimicry - and it is often very funny, too.

· At Pizza on the Park (020-7734 3220) until Saturday.