

# BWW Reviews: Displaying Vintage Performing Savoir Faire, DANNY BACHER Swings The Louis'--Armstrong, Prima, Jordan--at the Metropolitan Room

June 28



**Danny Bacher** has the performance ease of an artist who's spent twice his years on the circuit. His preternatural feel for swing delivers scrupulous control, hip, unfussy phrasing, nuanced inflection, and the kind of fluent, savory scat "wordless vocables" I haven't heard from a man in some time, certainly not one so young. His soprano saxophone and singing are so like one another in attitude and energy, Bacher epitomizes the musician whose instrument acts as solid manifestation of voice.

His new CD release celebration show at the Metropolitan Room, *Swing That Music* (last performance of a four-show run today at 4 pm) is a jazz tribute to the three Louis' (photo below, left to right): Louis Armstrong--Satchmo (1901-1971), Louis Prima--The King of Swing before Benny Goodman came along (1910-1978), and Louis Jordan--King of the Jukebox (1908-1975.) Musical numbers get along like the old friends they are, brushing shoulders, poking one another in the ribs, slapping backs. The show is well paced with next to no patter.

*If you want a guy with class who's way above the mass/Well, I'm not the right person obviously/But if you want to get that glow from a cat that's in the know/If it's love you want, baby, that's me . . .* (Louis Jordan.) With a raised eyebrow and a shrug, Bacher makes the insouciant



lyric conversational, leaning out to women at the front tables. Some of it is talking in tune, some effortlessly sung.

An up-tempo "I Want You To Be My Baby" (Jon Hendricks) with tongue-twisting verse requires audience participation. *I (I)/I want (I want)/I want you (I want you)/I want you to (I want you to)* . . . you get the idea. Bonhomie reigns. The crowd understands before being invited. Pete McGuinness (trombone) briefly takes expert flight. "Is You Is Or Is You Ain't My Baby?" (Louis Jordan), which reached #1 on 1944 US folk/country charts, is infectiously rhythmic. Bacher's tinted-southern accent sounds just right. His mid tenor voice is smooth- never blaring, never flagging. Gestures are blessedly minimal.

Taut, jacked up phrases with long vocal tails deliver the iconic "St. James Infirmary" (Traditional) about the wages of sin. The incomparable Warren Vache (cornet) comes in with heavy lidded, hip swingin', Sazerac-soaked passages of sheer insinuation. Danny weaves musical macramé on his horn. Other brass punctuates. The song's last phrase-- *And if anyone should happen to ask you/I've got those gamblers' blues* . . . rolls around the vocalist's mouth like tobacco readying spit.

Friday night's Guest Vocalist **Gabrielle Stravelli** begins their first duet with a swaying, brush and bass version of Edith Piaf's "La Vie En Rose" (in French.) Pronunciation is pristine. Facial expression reflects her vibrant, declaratory voice. Danny picks up existing accompaniment with an airbrushed "A Kiss To Build a Dream On" (Harry Ruby /Oscar Hammerstein II/ Bert Kalmar). Even consonants are soft. Single syllable words ripple with multiple notes. Vache's contribution oozes romance. "That Old Black Magic" (Harold Arlen/Johnny Mercer)--also a duet, is a whirlwind. Jason Teborek sounds like he has four hands on the piano. Tim Horner's drums are robust, rapid fire, and multi-layered. Vocalists are visibly having fun, playing well off one another. Then the singers come together. Lovely.



Swoony highlights include Gus Kahn's "Dream a Little Dream" and "Sunday Kind of Love" (Louis Prima.) Danny sings "Dream" like he means it. While polished, there's nothing artificial in his style. Message is not taken for granted. His saxophone doodles around the melody with piano as a soft shoe sidekick. Sunday emerges on gentle percussion and Dean Johnson's mellow bass. Teborek adds breezy flourishes. It's a white dinner jacket, country club dance number. Jay Rodriguez's fingers dance across his shadowy tenor sax as if sheer energy, propelled by nothing so clumsy as a hand.

"I Wanna Be Like You," written by Richard and Robert Sherman for Disney's *The Jungle Book* ("My tribute to Louis Prima as an orangutan," says Bacher) doesn't

weigh in despite great scat conversation between Danny and McGuiness. And I've never liked the hard charging interpretation "Just a Gigolo" (Irving Caesar) with "I Ain't Got Nobody" (Julius Brammer/R. Graham/ S. Williams), whose ebullience is in direct contradiction to lyrics.

Bacher's director, the outstanding **Marilyn Maye**, joins him on stage for his encore-- "Honeysuckle Rose" (Fats Waller/Andy Razoff.) It's flat out terrific. Both artists riff; jump in, move away, scat, sing, respect, and enjoy one another. Bennie Goodman once called jazz "free speech in music." Here it is in its best, symbiotic form.

The band is mind-bendingly fine.

Danny Bacher is the real deal; a musician to watch.

As for Bacher's CD of *Swing That Music* (excerpts from the show), it is beautifully produced, showcasing infectious arrangements and virtuoso musicianship.