

Sari Kessler Full Bio

With her debut album *Do Right* released in 2016, Sari Kessler has become a singular force in jazz, praised by critics for her recorded material and live performances alike. *JazzTimes* proclaimed her a “vital new voice,” stating, “Kessler maintains a welcome less-is-more approach that emphasizes the purity of her tone, with its enticing hint of duskiness, and the immaculate quality of her phrasing.” *All About Jazz* named her “a first-rate interpreter, (able) to tap into the marrow of a lyric and bring its essence to the foreground.”

To say that Sari Kessler has traveled a long way in her shoes is more than a metaphor. The New York-based jazz singer, songwriter, and arranger is also an avid runner, and it was only after finishing her first half-marathon that she knew anything was possible. Already a clinical psychologist with a thriving career, Kessler has pursued jazz singing with like-minded persistence, achieving a deeply personal and soulful sound.

A compelling storyteller and tasteful improviser, Sari exudes warmth and a joyful spirit both on and off the stage. She says, “I know my stories and I know myself. Being an effective jazz singer means finding myself in the lyric and investing each word with meaning.” Looking at a list of Kessler’s influences—including Carmen McRae, Nina Simone, and Ray Charles—highlights a tradition of great storytellers, each of whom carved an unbeaten path across the landscape of the Great American Songbook. While Sari’s background in pop and soul gave her the foundation to use her voice as an expressive tool, it was Grammy-nominated singer and educator Kate McGarry who helped her investigate the rhythmic and harmonic aspects of the jazz tradition in service of telling the story.

Kessler has shared the stage with the legendary talents of Houston Person, Gene Bertoncini, and Phoebe Snow, among others. She has appeared in the San Francisco Bay Area and at leading Manhattan venues such as The Blue Note, Jazz at Kitano, Cornelia Street Café, Minton’s, 55 Bar, and Jazz on the Plaza. In the Hamptons, she’s been featured at Shelter Island Jazzfest, and LI Winterfest.