

Jazz Notes Intel: Internet Sensation Camille Bertault Sprinkles Magic; Stephanie Chou Digs Into Her Cultural Heritage; Marriage of Jazz and Poetry





By Dan Ouellette, Senior Editor ZEALnyc, March 9, 2018



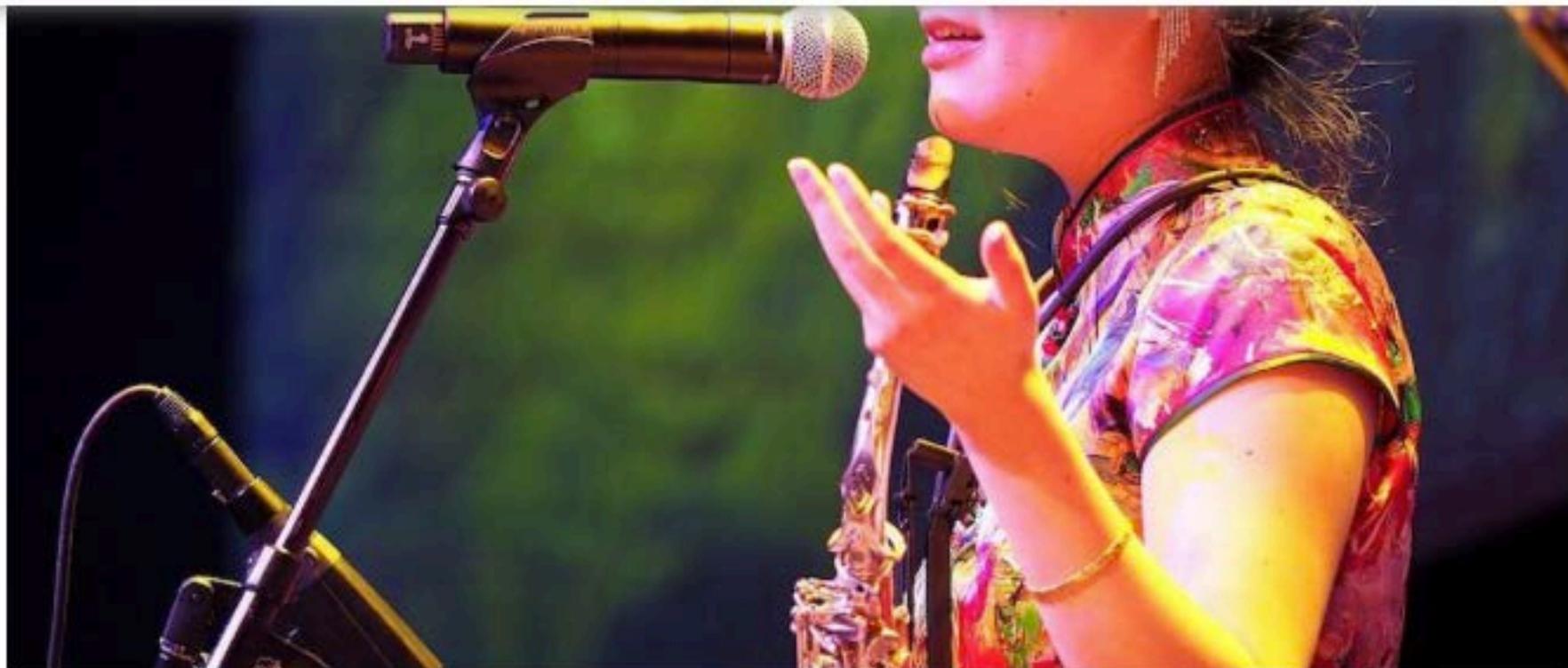
Stephanie Chou; photo: Emra Islek.

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Even though she excelled as a math major at Columbia University, Stephanie Chou had already looked ahead to a saxophone career, having played the alto and soprano since she was 10. The native New Yorker was first playing the western classical saxophone canon and then deepened her pursuit into the city's competitive improvisational circles. But then she hit upon a novel expression for her sax—and her vocals—by embracing her Chinese heritage and using its musical folk and pop legacy to create a unique blend of traditional Chinese, classical and jazz. She showcased this superbly at Lincoln Center's David Rubenstein Atrium on Thursday, March 8 to a full house.





Stephanie Chou at David Rubenstein Atrium, Lincoln Center; photo: Michael Yu.

With her exquisite arrangements, she led her quartet, including the standout of the evening string and erhu player Andy Lin (his erhu solo of the classic “Birds Singing in the Empty Mountain” was a sonic treat), on a rousing and lyrical set focused on her impressive album *Asymptote*. Chou’s English and Mandarin vocals (the latter more strongly delivered) often exquisitely eased into her alto lines delivered emotionally with only a few gusto moments—after all, this was not an instrumental showoff concert. What was so remarkable about Chou’s performance was its tasty diversity of styles, including her cooking gambol through the trad tune “General’s Command,” the calming “Quiet Night Thought” (based on an ancient Tang Dynasty poem by Li Po) and her playful, speeding tongue-twister “Eating Grapes.” At the end of the set, Chou introduced a new piece, “Manchurian Girl,” based on a 1938 Japanese pop tune that was also released in Chinese. The heart-wrenching yet happily playful song is a part of a larger work based on the Chinese comfort women in World War II. Sounds promising.