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Improvisations: Susan Abod and Steve Figueroa  
Vocalist and pianist dive headfirst into, new projects

BY MEL MINTER

Arriving for the sound check before her first appearance at the Women's Voices Concerts a few weeks back, vocalist Susan, Abod wasn't sure what to expect. She'd never played with the band for her set, led by pianist John Rangel. .

She launched into her first tune, which begins rubato before locking into a tempo, "So I'm kind of like moving my arm to give him the feel, and John says, 'Susan, stop conducting. Trust me. Just sing, and I'll be there,'

That's what the evening was for me,' I let it happen," she says:

Did she ever, singing with a freedom that exhilarated the audience. Blessed with a clear, expressive voice, daring playfulness and an empathetic heart, Abod filled the songs with a living presence that was irresistibly unpredictable.

Her energy and the buoyant humor in her own compositions are all the more remarkable for her ongoing struggle with chronic fatigue immune dysfunction syndrome and multiple chemical sensitivities syndrome, insidious conditions that sap body and mind. Four years ago, her search for a less-toxic living environment led Abod to move to Santa Fe from Boston, where she was enjoying great success with her singing career.

While she cast herself more as a cabaret singer in the past, she's been heading deeper into jazz territory these days-thanks in part to working with local guitar wizard Lewis Winn, who'll accompany her at the Outpost, along with Michael Olivola (bass) and John Bartlit (drums).

"I'm letting myself move more into improvisation," she says. "Working with Lewis really has been quite wonderful because 'as a duo, we just had a lot of space. So I had more opportunities to scat and improvise and stretch the phrasing and become more familiar with improvisation."

Abod also loves "characterizing songs in a different way," she says "I love when singers do that-take a James Taylor tune and completely change it around."

On her CD *In the Moment*, Abod does just that with The Drifters' "Up on the Roof"-the first song she ever heard on the radio, she says, Her interpretation is so singularly revealing that you want her to sing only other people's tunes, Except that her own are too good-full of wordplay, insight and a tenacious optimism.