

A Jazz Singer Saunters Through Old and New

Giacomo Gates
Kitano New York Hotel

that front. "Spinnin'," his take on the Lee Morgan tune "Speed-Ball" was a winsome, convincing romantic complaint; "Too Many Things," based on Thelonious Monk's "Think of One," was an awkward critique of consumerism. Neither was technically vocalese, because the lyrics were set to the songs' melodies.

And when Mr. Gates went the full distance on the standard "Lullaby of Birdland," affixing his own words to a Dexter Gordon extemporization, the results were more like prose than poetry. ("He was the cat that played the solo

**Reeling in the
audience, nimbly,
and in vocalese.**

that I'm singing for you tonight," Mr. Gates sang of Gordon, with dull accuracy.) Still, his execution was neat.

Wisely, he slipped a pair of songbook ballads into the set—"P.S. I Love You" and "You've Changed"—and each was a model of austere, straightforward parthos. And he closed with a winner: Monk's "Let's Call This," with original lyrics about the dwindling flame of a love affair.

"When I first met you/You were so inviting," Mr. Gates sang at the tune's start, articulating clearly. He held out the last syllable, "ing," for five and a half beats, echoing the jangle of Monk's pianism, and expecting everyone to get it.

Giacomo Gates approaches jazz singing with a showman's poise and an aficionado's zeal. Holding court on Wednesday night in the mezzanine lounge of the Kitano New York Hotel, he was solicitous but cool.

MUSIC He wanted to let his listeners in on a secret, bring them into his confidence. With his deep, cognac baritone and his

MATE CHINEN vintage-hipster lexicon, he seemed an appreciative throwback, eager to share credit with his precursors while mindful of keeping a little for himself.

Opening with "Melodious Funk," a medium-bright swinger from his most recent album, "Luminosity" (G88), Mr. Gates laid out his core principles from the start: sporty syncopeations, nimble turns of phrase, sure-footed scat choruses. His stage manner

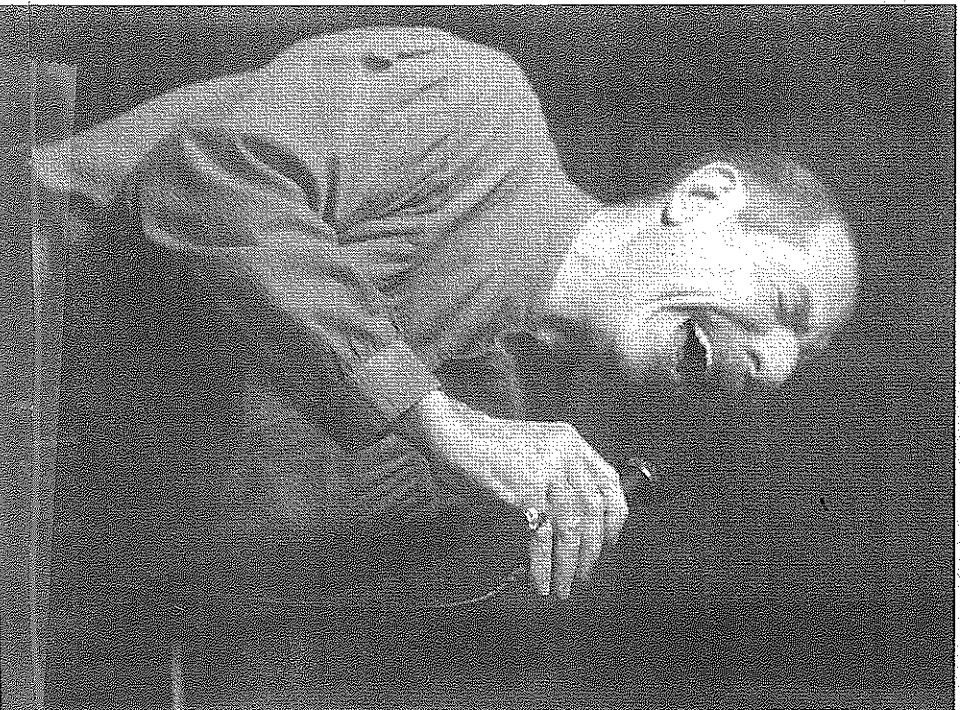
conveyed a muted but stout physicality, perhaps as a byproduct of his experience. (Before turning full time to jazz in 1990, he spent more than a dozen years in heavy construction, working on the

Trans-Alaska pipeline, among other things.) In his phrasing and his bearing, he upheld a distinctly masculine ideal of deceptive nonchalance.

Mr. Gates has made a specialty out of vocalese, the jazz practice of setting original lyrics to a musician's improvisations. It is probably no accident that his vocal timbre can evoke Eddie Jefferson, a pioneer in the style. Backed more than capably here by the pianist John di Martino and the bassist Steve Laspina,

Mr. Gates made a point of finessing Jefferson's "Disappointed," based on a Charlie Parker solo over Gershwin's "I'dy Be Good." He also made a point of featuring some lyrical inventions of his own.

There was mixed success on



JOE KOHEN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES
Giacomo Gates performing his own works and some standards.