



Cheltenham's Carol Lester joins lineup for this month's SOS concert

By Joseph D. Checchi
Correspondent

Cheltenham's own Carol Lester returns to familiar surroundings as one of several artists to play this month's SOS (Songwriters Original Showcase) concert. The lineup will include artists such as Philadelphia native son Ben Ansell, pianist Stephen DiJoseph, singer-songwriter Debra Lee, the folk of Vajinas, and Ambler's own Rick Devoin. This show will be held on Sunday, June 24 at Act II Playhouse in Ambler.

Lester, the pseudonym of Carol Shatten, has earned a name for herself locally. She now resides in Jersey City, N.J., and plays many small venues throughout the Big Apple. Coasting off Jersey City's "Culture Arts Festival" and "Artist on the Verge," a showcase in New York City sponsored by Starbucks Coffee, Lester had time for an interview by phone.

"Independent artists craft their music very carefully," says this rising star. Her CD can be described as a warm and intimate emotional mélange of songs where Airne Munn-like vocal styles meet Joni Mitchell-esque poetic and melodic structures. "Spill My Soul" (Carol Lester, 2000), her debut release, has been bringing her name to local audiences and to millions on TV. When Lester was asked to record a track for a USA Network Music, "Secret Cutting," starring Rhia Pustman and Katherine Peticola, she had no idea that her song would affect so many viewers. Countless e-mails came in, requesting information on the artist and the song. "When I perform I like to touch my audience with my music and I like to be touched by their reactions," she says.

She names Cat Stevens, Stevie Nicks, Led Zeppelin, Joni Mitchell, James Taylor and Jim Croce as influences on her songwriting. "These

artists have intimate delivery, I hear who they were and I connect with them," adds Lester, who has been writing music since she was a young girl. Like many teenagers she grew up listening to music with a listening behind it. "I love artists who are totally themselves."

"Spill My Soul" took seven months to record. Currently, Lester is putting together a follow-up album. "My favorite songs to play live are 'Spill My Soul' and 'Accept Them.' I teach the audience the chords and I tell them to sing," explains Lester. "I love when the audience participates."

In the coming months, Lester will appear live on WOPN 88.5 FM's "Women's Hour" with Michaela Majors; she is also scheduled to play some summer festivals and is in the process of cutting tracks with Latin sensation Luis Miguel. She is also a full-time mother, a part-time community activist and she relaxes with yoga classes. Fans can listen to her tracks from her album on her website: www.carol Lester.com.

Lester has no plans of leaving Jersey City. She loves the fact that all the connections are there at her fingertips. "I do wish there were more venues, though!" jokes Lester. She has built a strong following where she lives and is ready to move down the East Coast. Her first stop is Ambler and the SOS showcase. "At these showcases the artists performing tend to inspire each other," talks Lester. "This is a listening venue." Egg Harbor resident and close friend Tim Dowd will join her on percussion the night of the show. Don't be surprised if you are enjoying the lyrics of "Honeyuckle Slumber" or "So Be High" when all of a sudden Lester breaks into a cover of Chaka Khan's "Tell Me Something Good!" "My responsibility is to vary the sound, tempo and emotions," continues Lester. "I want the audience to enjoy themselves as well as express myself."

IF YOU GO

SOS (Songwriters Original Showcase), featuring Carol Lester, Ben Ansell, Stephen DiJoseph, Debra Lee, Rick Devoin & Vajinas, will take place at Act II Playhouse, 301 E. Butler Ave., Ambler, Sunday, June 24, 7 p.m. Tickets \$15. www.sos-concerts.com

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