

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:



Vocalist/Composer Sara Gazarek Embraces The Light & The Dark On Her Sixth Album **THIRSTY GHOST**

(Available August 23, 2019)

Featuring: Stu Mindeman-piano/organ/Rhodes, Alex Boneham-bass, Christian Euman-drums, Josh Johnson-alto sax, Ido Meshulam-trombone, Brian Walsh-bass clarinet, Keita Ogawa/Aaron Serfaty-percussion, Larry Goldings-organ
Plus Special Guest Vocalist-Kurt Elling, with vocal layering/backgrounds by Erin Bentlage & Michael Mayo

CD Release Tour Dates:

August 10 @ The Jazz Standard, NYC
August 14 @ Blues Alley, Washington, D.C.
August 16 & 17 @ Dirty Dog Jazz Café, Grosse Pointe, MI
September 16 @ Yoshi's, Oakland, CA
September 17 & 18 @ Jazz Alley, Seattle, WA
October 24 @ Guadalajara, Spain
October 25 @ Las Palmas, Gran Canaria
October 28-30 @ Café Central, Madrid, Spain

"a powerful, epic-yet-intimate collection of largely original songs and a few choice, at times surprising, covers. The overarching feeling and lyrical content reflect Gazarek's recent romantic tumult, and her commitment to grow from the experience and re-evaluate who she was as an artist and a person." – **Abe Beeson, KNKX**

"a wondrous, questioning, atmospheric and rhythmically diverse brew of jazz, folk-rock and art song, with some Latin and pop flavors thrown in. On Sam Smith's pining ballad of infidelity, 'Not the Only One,' underpinned with Fender Rhodes keyboard and silvery backup vocals, Gazarek falls off notes with a sigh. On Björk's 'Cocoon,' she creates a moody, ambient feel, using her clear soprano as a wordless instrument. A new arrangement of a signature piece that combines the Nick Drake song 'Riverman' with a poem by Sara Teasdale features haunting bass clarinet. Pianist Brad Mehldau's 'When It Rains' is propelled by a quietly urgent danzón beat, to which Gazarek added lyrics about the promise of a storm." – **Paul DeBarros, The Seattle Times**

"... she may well turn out to be the next important jazz singer." – **Don Heckman, The Los Angeles Times**

On vocalist/composer **Sara Gazarek's** previous five, critically-acclaimed albums (*Yours*-2005, *Live at The Jazz Bakery*-2006, *Return To You*-2007, *Blossom & Bee*-2012, *Dream In The Blue*-2016), we hear an accomplished artist steeped in the history of jazz and blues, who effortlessly explores complex rhythmic and harmonic ideas, expressive phrasing, to-die-for range, exquisite tone, and authentic story-telling, and so much more. **On her sixth recording, *Thirsty Ghost* (due out on August 23, 2019), we hear Gazarek's soul.** Over twelve select tunes (plus bonus tracks) we experience an un-caged Gazarek, flush with the courage, artistic volition, and musical acumen to be able to offer her audience **a transformative, revelatory album that explores a more honest, messy, beautiful place – of hunger, thirst, and of wanting more.** More connection, more transparency, and a more wholehearted experience that is welcomed only when one can finally address the exultation and lamentation that comes with taking a deeper look at adulthood.

Stumbling into a recording contract right out of college in 2004 not only came with big management and an even bigger booking agency — it also came with a lot of responsibility for a twenty year old artist. Gazarek quickly found herself recording, touring, and

interacting with press and new fans. And, while everything seemed to be moving in the right direction, this level of visibility at such a young age actually created a certain amount of pressure to be the carefree, light-hearted girl that her mentors and managers expected. Gazarek explains, “I had been told that the ultimate goal was to craft a set of fun, light music that left people feeling happier than when they’d come in the door. And my band and I were giving it to them.”

Four years ago, Gazarek found herself standing at a fork in the road regarding her artistic direction and *raison d'être*. The vocalist elaborated, “I had experienced a near-death trauma in my family, there was palpable tension in my long time musical partnership, and my marriage was crumbling. I was singing mostly straight ahead songs about light hearted things, and, in a genre that prides itself in authenticity and expression, an incessant knot in my stomach told me something was about to explode. It was my dear friend and mentor Kurt Elling who, after a performance at Birdland in NYC, metaphorically took me by the shoulders and shook my soul with these very poignant words:”

“I see who you are... And it’s so much bigger, so much deeper, so much more multi-dimensional than your music is right now. Don’t be afraid to walk away from what you think people want from you – and to step into all of the depth, darkness, and radiance of who you really are. That’s what we are thirsty for. The honest, messy, beautiful YOU.”

As the dust began to settle, Gazarek stood in a state of bewilderment -- and, like any artist, she did all she knew how to do: she took a deep breath, and turned headlong into her art. She listened, wrote, read, improvised, traveled, sought, leapt, learned, and watched. Gazarek explained, “I finally felt ready to explore new songs and sounds, hoping to give voice to very specific experiences and, in some instances, wounds that I wanted to heal.” Gazarek worked alongside Stu Mindeman, Josh Johnson, Geoff Keezer, Larry Goldings, Erin Bentlage, and Alan Ferber, in an attempt to reconnect with her own authentic creative voice. “We began to perform these songs, and it was entirely terrifying, but necessary. And most importantly, it felt exhilarating to finally be making art that reflected what I was experiencing – music that was vulnerable and human. In the end, I internalized the idea that ‘a forest never grows, higher than the depths it knows // the warmth of sunlight comes and goes, but beauty only grows, When It Rains. (*Distant Storm*)”

In retrospect, Gazarek is now able to acknowledge that, while her world was falling apart, it may have felt wildly chaotic – but that now, looking back, she sees a beautifully orchestrated ballet that brought her exactly where she needed to be. “I’m finally here, living wholeheartedly in the light and the dark,” explains Gazarek. “We decided to record these songs, in the hopes that people might see their own human experiences reflected back at them, through these songs and these arrangements.”

More about the music from *Thirsty Ghost*, with Sara Gazarek:

Lonely Hours – Gazarek first discovered this song through the Sarah Vaughan recording, “Lonely Hours.” She explains, “I was record shopping with my friend Jeff Babko, and found this one — I thought, I love these orchestrators, and these songs. This is for me. I hadn’t heard the title track before, and I fell in love. I approached Josh Johnson and asked him to arrange it for an upcoming show in Los Angeles. I explained that I wanted something that felt like that ‘pacing the floor at 3am’ feeling, living in that emotional rollercoaster of desire and mourning. I love what he came up with – the off kilter 5/4 meter and the explosive dynamic shifts are so evocative.”

Never Will I Marry – Nancy Wilson’s version of this song with Cannonball Adderley is iconic. Gazarek wanted a treatment of the song that felt more contemporary, but in a way that was less declarative, and more welcoming. “I was in a place where I had just come out of my own marital dissolution, and wanted to explore the world — all the while embracing the idea that I might not ALWAYS feel that way. There’s a question in this arrangement, an openness that lends itself to change.”

Easy Love – “I remember being at a point where I realized that I might actually be ready to open myself up to love again, but I didn’t want it to be difficult. Any kind of relationship built on love is supposed to take work – but it shouldn’t feel hard. Just like how a bird isn’t aware that the wind and sky are there supporting it, I wanted something that felt free of muscle and force,” said Gazarek.

I Get Along Without You Very Well – Exclusive to the U.S. release of *Thirsty Ghost* (not available on the Japanese release). This song is very special to Gazarek. She elaborates, “I remember sitting in Stu’s living room in Chicago, talking to him about how heartbreaking this lyric is, but how meditative, raw, and open it felt to be in the space of denial – vacillating between the real truth and the truth we wished we were living.”

I Believe When I Fall in Love – Gazarek uses this lyric and arrangement to embed a sense of unsteadiness and reality into the relationship, and to express it as equal parts declaration and question; “I Believe When I Fall In Love with you, it will be . . . forever?” The story and climax of this song, the tension and release of the arrangement, the driving instrumentation and percussion spin the song and story in an entirely new way.

Jolene – Gazarek’s “Jolene” grabs you by the throat and never lets go. Gazarek laughs (now) that when she experienced her own “Jolene,” her reaction was NOT to kindly ask her to “please don’t take my man” – but rather to break things, and curb a great desire to burn down the house. “I told Geoff Keezer that I wanted something much more fiery, maybe slower than the original but with some double-time implications. He came back with what he called, ‘Trent Reznor meets Game of Thrones’, which I think (somehow) perfectly conveys what we wanted to get across,” says Gazarek.

Gaslight District – If “Jolene” grabs you by the throat, this original composition conjures up emotions of haunting uncertainty. Gazarek elaborates, “I asked Larry to write this one with me, with this title in mind. It was a play on words – the Gaslamp District of San Diego, and being ‘gaslighted’ by a partner. The lyric takes an interesting turn from imagery to literal storyline, and I think Stu Mindeman, Alan Ferber, and Erin Bentlage were all able to capture the foggy undertones, lack of clarity, darkness, etc., that was needed to tell this story.” The vamp at the end is worth the price of admission alone.

The River/River Man – This is a pairing of a Sara Teasdale poem (The River) with Nick Drake’s “River Man”. Gazarek shares, “the thing I adore about Nick Drake’s writing is that it’s poetic in an ambiguous way, leaving so much to the interpretation of the listener. I wanted to shed some light on what this story means to me, and paired the two with that intention in mind. The poem speaks about leaving something in search of more or better ground, but realizing, once you’ve left and arrived at this new destination, the idea was better than the reality. It’s an anthem for being happy with what you already have, and the freedom in not constantly questioning it.”

Cocoon – This Bjork song typifies how in tune, supportive, and loving Gazarek’s musicians are throughout the entire album – every note is perfectly placed, played, and expressed for the sole purpose of framing and supporting her. “Cocoon is one of the most terrifying songs on the album for me. It’s incredibly exposed, and there are so many beautiful, vulnerable, flawed moments throughout the track. I’ve never felt so honest and bare on a recording before. This song speaks to finally experiencing love after such a long journey, and the blinding light finally coming through, after the dark. The joy that one can feel once you’ve processed so much hurt, and are finally able let go and breathe into the bigness of it all,” explains Gazarek.

Distant Storm – This song (originally an instrumental composition by pianist, Brad Mehldau) essentially serves as the title track of the album. “Thirsty Ghost” is a lyric from the verse, and speaks to the over-arching lesson that was learned in the story of this record. Gazarek explains, “a *Thirsty Ghost*, to me, is someone who is searching to be satiated (desperate for feeling, emotion, validation, love, etc), but is unable to fully process said satiation because they are not whole – they’re incomplete, a ghost, a shell. **Once I wholeheartedly embraced the light AND the dark in my life and my art, I was finally able to feel this sweeping wealth of experience and emotion. And that’s what this song -- and this entire record – is about.**” The poem in the middle, sung by Kurt Elling, was also penned by Gazarek in an attempt to encapsulate what he shared with her all those years ago: “he’s this voice, a distant gift, reminding me of who I am, calling me to step into that space... Thank goodness Brad Mehldau graciously approved the lyrics – the story of *Thirsty Ghost* wouldn’t be complete without this song!”

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