

“Julie Gold: Closing the Distance”

October 3, 2023 Gerry Geddes

The mission statement of the annual Village Trip Festival is “To uplift, to entertain, and to celebrate the arts for all New Yorkers, their families, and all people from around the world who come to visit Downtown Manhattan’s special oases, Greenwich Village and the East Village.” It covers music, theatre, fine arts, politics, written word, spoken word, dance, and so much more in two weeks overflowing with talent and good will.



One of the highlights of this year’s festival was *Julie Gold: Closing the Distance* starring the famed Greenwich Village denizen, singer/songwriter **Julie Gold**, composer of such classic songs as “From a Distance,” “Goodnight, New York,” The concert was presented in a small, friendly, packed auditorium in the Greenwich House Music School on Barrow Street. The room was filled with people from all over (not just the Village) who had come to know and appreciate Ms. Gold over the years. They were not disappointed. Early in the proceedings, she remarked that she could identify most audience members by name. The setting was warm, welcoming, and simple with just a piano and a microphone on stage but from

that stage she turned the event into a beautifully woven, exquisitely ornamented tapestry of her life and, by extension, Village life.

I can think of no other singer that so seamlessly blends her spoken words with her lyrics. Her voice remains constant throughout, so that by the time she closes the set with her “greatest hit,” even the well-known words of “From a Distance” are transformed into a personal statement, making us forget Bette Midler, Nanci Griffith, and the hundreds of other versions and listen to its message anew. Gold is having a conversation with the audience for the entire hour, whether she is speaking or singing. Her combination of wisdom, humility, and humor is as compelling as it is rare. The old phrase, “I could listen to her all night,” could have been created to describe Julie Gold in concert.

She opened with “Temporary Worker,” a charming, funny memory of her first jobs in NYC while she plied her songwriting craft in her spare time. “The Real World” was a perfect paean to the neighborhood being celebrated. Its infectious beat and joyous vocal recalled the best of the Brill Building (the professional home of Carole King, Barry Mann, Neil Diamond, and the other architects of the ’60s sound). The humor of “Temporary Worker” burst into hilarity with her country-ish lament of her inability to embrace the technical world, “Genius Bar.” I identified completely as she declared, “I miss my transistor radio...all I had to do was turn it on and off.”

As I mentioned, “Southbound Train” is one her true classics and it soared in this autobiographical setting like an evocative short story moving from the energy and apprehension of youth, through the pain and joy of “living life in mid-range,” to the wisdom, regret, and celebration of a grown-up life fully lived. Each of these observations was present throughout the show, but my heart caught when they combined in this one song. “Heartbreak Diet” got great laughs as she suggested that the surest way to kill one’s appetite was downright despair! From a trio of songs inspired by and written during the pandemic (and she stressed, they were the *only* songs to come out of the pandemic), the standout was “New York is Out of Love with Me,” perfectly capturing the unease and misgivings a lot of us have felt after lockdown.

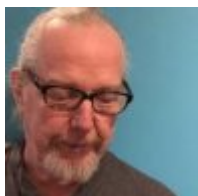
A comic song to rival Tom Lehrer and George Winters followed to change the mood. Beginning as a tribute to all our “canine friends,” it quickly settled on one, “Rosco, the Bed Bug Sniffing Dog.” The laughs were loud and long and interrupted only by a well-deserved sing-along at the end. More Brill Building presented itself with Gold’s celebration of leaving the work-a-day world to fully commit to being a songwriter and performer, “Lucky Me,” which grew from that into what seemed to be a glorious shout out to the joy of coming out. Approaching the end of the night, she added one more New York song for the occasion—one of her best and one of *the* best and most emotional tributes to the city, “Good Night, New York.” It is somehow thirty years old this year and never more telling and timely as it memorialized immigrants, family, love, and what the city means to so many. Following a charming story of her debut at Carnegie Hall thanks to Nanci Griffith, she closed the show with “From a Distance,” needlessly apologizing for not singing it like Nanci or Bette because

she wanted to do it the way she wrote it. As if we would want it any other way.

Another old phrase comes to mind: “It takes a village to raise a child,” but with a revision: “It takes an iconic singer-songwriter-raconteur to praise a village.” The wonderful Julie Gold fit the bill perfectly.

###

Presented by The Village Trip Festival at Greenwich House Music School, 46 Barrow St., September 22, 2023.



About the Author

Gerry Geddes

Gerry Geddes has conceived and directed a number of musical revues—including the Bistro- and MAC Award-winning “Monday in the Dark with George” and “Put On Your Saturday Suit- Words & Music by Jimmy Webb”—and directed many cabaret artists, including André De Shields, Helen Baldassare, Darius de Haas, and drag artist Julia Van Cartier. He directs “The David Drumgold Variety Show,” currently in residence at Manhattan Movement & Arts Center, and has produced a number of recordings, including two Bistro-winning CDs. He’s taught vocal performance at The New School, NYU, and London’s Goldsmith’s College and continues to conduct private workshops and master classes. As a writer and critic, he has covered New York’s performing arts scene for over 40 years in both local and national publications; his lyrics have been sung by several cabaret and recording artists. Gerry is an artist in residence at Pangea, and a regular contributor to the podcast “Troubadours & Raconteurs.” He just completed a memoir of his life in NYC called “Didn’t I Ever Tell You This?”

[← Previous Post](#)

[Next Post →](#)

[HOME](#)

[ABOUT US](#)

[FEATURES](#)

[CLUB REVIEWS](#)

[ALBUM REVIEWS](#)

[CONTACT](#)

