

At The Queen's Hall this week – Tina May



The woman who walks in Ethan Hawke's shoes

Tina May doesn't look or sound anything like Hollywood heart-throb Ethan Hawke. But when the award-winning Bedfordshire-based singer takes to the Queen's Hall stage with Italian pianist Enrico Pieranunzi on Thursday 29 September 2016, she will be stepping into the shoes Hawke filled in his most recent film, *Born to be Blue*.

The character Hawke plays in the film, jazz trumpeter and singer Chet Baker, was complex and has been described as "many different people" by those who knew him. Years of drug addiction, which contributed to this one-time pin-up turning into a ravaged, toothless wreck, took a heavy toll on Baker.

His musical judgement, however, remained sound and in Baker's estimation Enrico Pieranunzi was the best. The two musicians worked together on many tours and on some of Baker's favourite recordings between their first meeting in 1978 and Baker's death ten years later. And although Pieranunzi knew of Baker's addiction problems, the two never spoke about them as Baker sheltered the Italian from his dark side.

"I've spoken with Enrico about Chet and it seems that the person Ethan Hawke portrayed in *Born to be Blue* had a very sweet disposition as well as everything else that was going on," says May, who was introduced to Pieranunzi by a mutual friend in 2011. "Having sung and recorded with Enrico, I can understand why Chet was so fond of him. He's classically trained but hugely experienced as a jazz musician and he loves the blues, which was an important element in Chet's music too."

Baker, whose admirers include Elvis Costello and Van Morrison, was once targeted by a marketing company looking for a hunk to model jeans in a television commercial.

“Unfortunately, by then – towards the end of his life – Chet was no longer the trim young man in the t-shirt that these people had seen in photos of Chet as a youthful emerging star in California in the 1950s,” says May, a past winner of the BT Jazz Awards’ Best Vocalist title who has worked with a kaleidoscope of talents, including the great American jazz players Nat Adderley, Joe Henderson and Ray Bryant and comedian Rory Bremner.

The Queen’s Hall concert is part of a UK tour in support of May and Pieranunzi’s first album together, *Home is Where the Heart Is*, and will focus mainly on their own song writing. They will, however, be including some songs associated with Baker in their concerts, including *Born to be Blue*.

“Whatever people say about Chet’s personality and his life away from music, he still left a great legacy,” says May. “The songs he sang – and his singing of them – are timeless.”

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