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## **Jane Monheit: Elegant, retro jazz vocalist**

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For The Inquirer

When Jane Monheit released her first album in 2000, it was an auspicious start to the 21st century and the role of the new female jazz singer. Claudia Acuña, Katie Melua, and the poppier Norah Jones debuted around the same time, but none had Monheit's elegance and ability to phrase in such unique and stately fashion within the jazz canon.

Often tagged a retro jazz classicist, Monheit had poise, clarity, and control with a strange natural sense of voicing. The manner in which she parsed each syllable - these were influences you couldn't always define; a little springy Anita O'Day here, some smoky Anita Baker there.

Nine years later, in front of a packed house Saturday at the Annenberg Center, Monheit, 31, was no less impressive or dynamic a singer, even if some of the mystery in her music gave way to something more manifest.

This recently minted mom (her husband is her band's drummer, Rick Montalbano) and dark-haired New York beauty talked much about her family's new addition in connection to her set list, and her happiness also seeped into her songs.

"Lucky to Be Me" was sweet-toned, while "That's All" featured a cutesy arrangement and a prancing vocal.

Yet, even when things threatened to get saccharine, her voice thrilled. The way she flattened and held her R's during "That's All" and "Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea" was mighty and precocious.

During Ivan Linn's "No Tomorrow," Monheit toyed with the Brazilian melody's placid arrangements in low silken tones.

Her playfulness did not end there. After dedicating Hoagy Carmichael's "Stardust" to Upper Darby's Joel Dorn - the late, legendary producer who released her first few albums - Monheit and pianist Michael Kanan spit-shined the shopworn classic into something buoyant and bright, with her waltzing phrasing leading their charge.

And though the world may not need another rendition of "Over the Rainbow," Monheit and her band saved the day by tying it to an absolutely lovely, even stoic, version of

"The Rainbow Connection" - a Muppet-themed enterprise whose cool childishness was welcome.