

## **Anya Turner & Robert Grusecki: In This Raggedy Time**

Don't Tell Mama, NYC, May 29, 2022

Reviewed by Bart Greenberg, *Cabaret Scenes*



Anya Turner & Robert Grusecki

“And so the lesson is to learn how to cope, don't be a dope, figure it out because it's all about the ebb and the flow. Nothing ever lasts forever.”

Artists responded to the pandemic lockdown in many different ways. Some escaped to the country. Some put on 10 pounds. Spouses and collaborators Anya Turner and Robert Grusecki wrote a book (a wonderful collection of their lyrics entitled *Words Matter*) and created a series of Zoom musical performances that led to their new CD, *In This Raggedy Time*. The title tune, with its appropriate ragtime feel, gives us the advice quoted above. The album is filled with songs both topical and reflective, and especially with story songs that touch the heart, and the duo offered up the entire collection in their program at Don't Tell Mama. With their unfussy, intimate style, they won the hearts of all assembled. Turner has a truly lovely mezzo-soprano, and she invests her vocals with compassion. In many ways she is reminiscent of the late Barbara Cook. Grusecki plays the piano and sings in an easy style that grounds Turner's flights of fancy; they are perfectly matched performing partners.

Turner acknowledged that while they were proud of what they had accomplished during the lockdown, what they missed was being before a live audience. She expressed this thought with her moving “What I Miss,” which served to look both forward and backwards with a bittersweet warmth. Spending that time in captivity seemingly improved their performance by adding a sense of urgency. Some of their interpretations of their work have shifted as well: “Sometimes you write a song and think it’s about one thing, and then you grow a little and discover it’s something else.” Grusecki’s optimistic response was strictly a forward-looking “So Much More.”

Their story songs, such as “The Alibi” (a working man’s bar serving as a setting for an imperfect family) and “Elizabeth 1918” (a tribute to Turner’s great aunt who passed in the flu epidemic of that year) glowed in their compassion and understanding of human nature.

The highlights of the evening were two autobiographical duets: “Glittering Prizes,” a lyrical and almost mystical piece about the purchase of an essential piano, and “That’s Why I Love You,” a sweet and swinging duet that recounted the beginnings of their own romance.

What a pleasure it was to reunite with these skilled contemporary troubadours as they confronted the newest challenges of life with grace, wit, and love.