



CD/LP/Track Review

## Melanie Dahan: *La Princesse et les Croque-Notes* (2009)

By **RAUL D'GAMA ROSE**, Published: May 28, 2009

There is a certain something about *La Princesse et les Croque-Notes*, and it is the same *je ne sais quoi* that exists in the first blush of wine and in the beguiling smile of Mona Lisa. It is that mesmerizing something filled with *duende* and *saudades*. It is Spanish and African and Brazilian all rolled into French, but above all it is, tantalizing, memorable, chanson and jazz.



Melanie Dahan is a vocalist of the highest order and on this record she connects the art of chanson from its earliest times through modern chanson turning the music of Charles Aznavour, Jacques Brel and Leo Ferre into contemporary standards swirling in a powerful vortex of jazz. Blessed with a gymnastic contralto Dahan stretches her lithe voice to leap and dart and soar across a vocal stratosphere as if she were painting a canvas delicately with sound. Whether she is channeling pathos or being heraldic, Dahan appears able to pirouette across space, glide subtly between tones and she can vault from rhythmic precipice to rhythmic precipice, always seeming to recover enough to take flight again.

Her vocals are deliciously dainty on "La Salle et la Terrasse," feminine yet sinewy on "L'enfant Maquille" and majestic on "La Princesse et le Croque Notes," all the while being the model of precision in her interpretations of the inner rhythms and slurring gentility of the chansons of Aznavour and Brassens. On Claude Nougaro and Aldo Romano's "Rimes," she hits the rhythmic center of the music with aplomb and she shows she can skit puckishly on Pierre Bourrouh and Francis Lai's "A Bicyclette." On every other song, especially "La mer a Boire," she finds the heart of the piece from the very first notes she begins to sing.

This is contemporary chanson at its very best. There are moments though when Dahan steers her song through the heart of the polyphonic song, conjuring up spirits of *rondeau*, *virelai* and *chanson baladee*—just a hint though, enough to praise the art and worship at the altar of its high priests and priestesses—from Daufay to Piaf.

In a miraculous manner, Dahan—the producer—has also managed to bring just that perfect musical balance to the instrumentation of each song with the core group of bassist Marc-Michel le Bevillon and drummer Matthieu Chazarenc. But the most magnificent interplay is between vocalist and pianist. On songs like "La Salle..." and the title track, when vocalist and pianist get into the heart of the song, it feels as if medieval sorcery is at work.

Not since Chick Corea and Flora Purim on *Light As A Feather* (Polydor, 1973) and specially on "500 Miles High," has there been such a sublime, symbiotic relationship between singer and pianist. And now Melanie Dahan and Giovanni Mirabassi on *La Princesse et les Croque-Notes* intertwine in a marvelous relationship of music and lyric poetry. The art of chanson cavorts sensuously with the art of jazz in an unforgettable way.

Track Listing: La Salle et la Terrasse; L'enfant Maquille; La Princesse et le Croque-notes; Les Poetes; J'aimerais tant Savoir; Rimes; Le Hais les Dimaches; Si tu me Payes un Verre; A Bicyclette; La Mer a Boire; Je me suis fait tout Petit; Le petit Bal Perdu.

Personnel: Melanie Dahan: voice; Giovanni Mirabassi; piano; Marc-Michel le Bevillon: contrabass; Matthieu Chazarenc; drums; Pierrick Pedron: alto saxophone (5, 9).

Record Label: [Sunnyside Records](#)

Style: Vocal



390 Recommend It!



### Editorial Reviews

Parisian based singer Melanie Dahan, 29 at this time of this, her debut recording, has studied with Sara Lazarus and Michelle Hendriks, displays an affinity for French lyricists like Bernard Dimey and Charles Aznavour, and exploits the innocent side of jazz without going strictly into ballad or romantic territory. Her tunes, sung exclusively in French, tell various tales of life and love, but also are somewhat self-deprecating, at times silly, ironic, or humorous. She is expertly accompanied by a trio led by the wondrous Giovanni Mirabassi, a staunch modernist who shades the songs with light or bright (no grays or in-between) colors, modal-to-contemporary classical elements, and at times jazz swing. Dahan possesses a sweet altissimo voice that is neither seductive nor siren-like. She enjoys being a girl during the playful 5/4 beats of "L'Enfant Maquille" where she speaks of enjoying make-up, or the title track referring to her love for shoes. Her artistic side comes through during "Rimes/Rhymes" alongside Mirabassi's dancing waltz steps, or the very slow ballad "Les Poetes," decelerated to a crawl with the pianist keeping a tortured but brilliant song in rein. Fans of Aznavour will recognize "Je Hais Les Dimanches" in a tick-tock beat as the singer exclaims her disdain for Sunday, while the Harlem stride flavored "Je Me Suis Fait Tout Petit," roughly translated as "I Make Myself Small" is a fun, one-minute, bouncy based scat, and "Le Petit Bal Perdu," or "Go to the Last Dance" is the opposite end of the emotional spectrum, a dour 3/4 waltz with Mirabassi's piano bringing the mood far down. Dimey's lyrics are best heard during "La Salle Et La Terrasse," another of many waltzes, this time enlivened by Mirabassi's modal, McCoy Tyner-styled "My Favorite Things" type piano chords, while "La Mer A Boire" is not so much cute as the other tunes, but expresses that Dahan can be difficult and high maintenance. The cool alto saxophonist Pierrick Pedron is included on the easygoing "A Bicyclette" and the skipping waltz "J'Aimerais Tant Savoir." Those who do not speak or understand the French language will not relate to these selections, but those who do can gain appreciation for French popular singing from this young chanteuse who is learning the ropes, and offers her own modern perspective within traditional means.

~ Michael G. Nastos, *Rovi All Music Guide*

# Mélanie Dahan: La Princesse et les Croque-Notes

By [Deanne Sole](#) 11 May 2009

The French jazz singer Mélanie Dahan and the piano player Giovanni Mirabassi met a few years ago at a tribute to the poet-songwriter Bernard Dimey, who died in 1981. Dimey's presence runs through *La Princesse et les Croque-Notes* and so do the presences of other respected, popular, French performers and songwriters: Charles Aznavour, Claude Nougaro, Georges Brassens. Dahan's swinging alto is the focus here, but attention should also be paid to Mirabassi, who darts around, innovating joyously. She glides and gleams. He pecks and chimes. The album is illuminated by their partnership. The drama of "L'Enfant Maquillé", the conversational intimacy of "Je Hais les Dimanches"—all of this is electric, attractive.



## Mélanie Dahan

*La Princesse et les Croque-Notes*  
(Sunnyside; US: 9 May 2009; UK:  
Available as import)

- [Amazon](#)
- [MOG](#)

## FRENCH PRESS – TRANSLATION

TELERAMA – *Mélanie ! She's not only pretty, but she sings very well too. In "la princesse et les croque-notes", her recent album, she takes a lot of pleasure in "revitalizing" with taste beautiful French songs. Moreover, she knows how to choose her musicians, some big names who like her very much (...). What do the people want ? pleasure, here it is. Here she is, Mélanie Dahan. It's a bit of all right !*

Michel CONTAT

JAZZMAN - *Melanie Dahan's beautiful voice on an anthology of French songs is a success.*

(Monthly Jazz Magazine: 40 000 ex.)

JAZZMAG - *Mélanie Dahan makes jazz with a beautiful French repertoire. It's really nicely done. Arrangements and instrumental initiatives with a lot of coherence.*

LE NOUVEL OBS - *The singer who is going up and up...she has just released her album, a mastered and original one for which she gathered huge musicians.*

PARIS CAPITALE - *It's been said French language does not fit swing. This singer proves the contrary.*

CHORUS - *Very particular voice, natural smile, a temperament full of will, Mélanie Dahan reinvents the love wedding between Chanson and Jazz. What a feast !*

LA TERRASSE - *A value up in French vocal jazz, young Mélanie Dahan is making a success of her album.*

LES DERNIERES NOUVELLES DU JAZZ - *This record is a beautiful surprise. A record of French songs transformed into jazz standards thanks to Giovanni Mirabassi's arrangements.*