

NY CULTURE

A Family Tradition of Making Music

Maude Maggart, Fiona Apple's sister, Brings 'Sincerity' to American Standards

By **WILL FRIEDWALD**

Feb. 24, 2014 10:05 p.m. ET

When Maude Maggart makes her Café Carlyle debut on Tuesday, she will be representing a diverse family of performers: Her grandmother was a Ziegfeld girl, her grandfather was a big-band vocalist and saxophonist and her parents met during a 1970 Broadway run of "Applause."



Maude Maggart *LYNN REDMILE*

But it is Ms. Maggart's relationship, both personal and musical, with her younger sister, the singer-songwriter Fiona Apple, that is most fascinating; it transcends a dividing line in contemporary music. There's usually a demarcation between performing composers like Ms. Apple, 36 years old, and vocalists like Ms. Maggart (who just turned 39), who, rather than write their own material, instead interpret and personalize existing songs. (The sisters, whose birth names are Amber McAfee Maggart and Fiona Apple McAfee Maggart, both take elements of their stage names from their late grandmother, the former Maude Apple Robinson.)

"The funny thing is that when we were little kids, back in the 1980s, I was the one listening to current pop songs on AM radio, and Fiona was teaching herself to play all the great American

standards on the piano from a fake book," said Ms. Maggart, from their mother's apartment on the Upper West Side, where they grew up and where she had just helped their mother dig her car out of two feet of snow.

"We've kind of reversed," she added. "Now I'm known for singing the songbook, she's known for writing contemporary songs, but she knows much more about the classic songs than I do."



Fiona Apple GETTY IMAGES

"Maude is a liar," Ms. Apple responded via email. "I assure you, she is intimate with these songs, whereas I only used the songbooks to learn to play piano."

Great songs can be reinterpreted by subsequent generations, "because they're so well-written and because they're about feelings that are timeless," Ms. Maggart said. "It's about bringing a fresh attitude to them."

Ms. Apple contrasted her sister's approach with that of the many pop stars who have recorded standards as "some chic way of getting noticed."

"Maude doesn't recycle old favorites," she said. "She gives herself to the songs as though they've chosen her, and she is respectfully, lovingly, obliging their wish to be understood."

The sisters have sung together before—on "Hot Knife," part of Ms. Apple's 2012 album "Idler Wheel," and in "I'm in the Middle of a Riddle," a song on Starbucks's Valentine's Day anthology "Sweethearts 2014." Yet Ms. Maggart has yet to perform any Fiona Apple songs on her own shows or albums, including her newly released "Speaking of Dreams."

"I have a fear that people would think I'm just cashing in on my sister's fame," said Ms. Maggart.

Ms. Apple didn't see it that way. "If anyone in the future were to sing my songs," she said, "I goddamn hope they are as sincere and genuine as my sister is."