

MUSIC REVIEW

## Fusions in Song and Life

By [STEPHEN HOLDEN](#)

Published: November 6, 2011

Instead of science fiction, think of it as alchemy. That is one way to view John Pizzarelli and Jessica Molaskey's brilliant new show, "When Worlds Collide," at the Café Carlyle. Their pairings of songs and voices from different eras and genres (the Beatles with Woody Herman, Antonio Carlos Jobim with Stephen Sondheim, and many more) are not destructive musical collisions in which planets explode. Instead of repelling each other, these alien climates, once in proximity, fuse, generate electricity and create an environment larger and more complex than the sum of its parts.

The same might be said of the chemistry between [Mr. Pizzarelli](#), the jazz guitarist, crooner and wit, and his wife, [Ms. Molaskey](#), a jazz-wise theater singer who deconstructs songs with a subtle but devastating psychological acuity. In personal terms "When Worlds Collide" might be described as a portrait of their marriage.

Consider the [couple's](#) exquisite melding of "Shine On, Harvest Moon" with Neil Young's "Harvest Moon" at Tuesday's opening-night show. Their voices and Mr. Pizzarelli's delicate guitar meshed and embraced to evoke a picture of longtime lovers stepping outdoors to dance in autumn moonlight and reaffirm their bond. Just as magical was a bossa nova arrangement of Billy Joel's "Rosalinda's Eyes" gently imparted by Mr. Pizzarelli, playing a Puerto Rican musician dreaming of his muse; it was attached to Mr. Sondheim's "In Buddy's Eyes," a wife's delusional certainty of how she appears to her husband, sung by Ms. Molaskey.

The most ambitious instrumental hybrid filtered the Allman Brothers classic “In Memory of Elizabeth Reed” through Wes Montgomery’s “Four on Six.” The accompanying musicians included Larry Fuller, a pianist as fleet on the keyboard as Mr. Pizzarelli is on guitar, Martin Pizzarelli (the guitarist’s younger brother) on bass and Tony Tedesco on drums.

In the light of his partnership with Ms. Molaskey, Mr. Pizzarelli’s solo renditions of heavy-duty ballads like the Beach Boys’ “God Only Knows” and Mr. Sondheim’s “Sorry-Grateful” took on a prayerful intensity. As he crooned “God Only Knows” in a near murmur, you listened more intently than you might otherwise to what the song is actually saying: “God only knows what I’d be without you.” The Sondheim song, from “Company,” describes the emotional ambivalence embodied in coupling: “You’re sorry-grateful, regretful-happy.” Mr. Pizzarelli’s performances of both songs in his wife’s presence conveyed a boyish plaintiveness.

Singing Paul Simon’s “Hearts and Bones,” a song about a traveling couple considering their uncertain future together, Ms. Molaskey was given the last word about the collision of two very different people. The tone was hopeful. “You take two bodies and you twirl them into one/Their hearts and their bones/And they won’t come undone.”

*John Pizzarelli and Jessica Molaskey perform through Nov. 26 at the Café Carlyle, 35 East 76th Street, Manhattan. AND at The Venetian Room, Fairmont San Francisco for one night only: February 26 at 8 p.m. Single tickets for this show (\$45) are available at [www.bayareacabaret.org](http://www.bayareacabaret.org). Bay Area Cabaret subscribers and others attending Mr. Pizzarelli’s 5 p.m. Duke Ellington tribute performance, may buy tickets to the 8 p.m. show at a price of \$30 with no service charge at (415) 927-4636.*