

UNDER A PAINTED SKY

JazzTimes

by Christopher Loudon

"Perhaps it's her training as an actress, but there's a marvelous clarity about Judy Wexler, both in terms of her immaculate phrasing and intonation and in her ability to strip a song, any song, to its bare essence, fully capturing its spirit and soul without an ounce of pretense or affectation. Her vocal disposition is naturally sunny and expansive, rather like the perennially underappreciated Doris Day, which doesn't preclude Wexler from effectively shading heartbreakers like Abbey Lincoln's "And How I Hoped for Your Love."

Lincoln is one of a handful of heroes whom Wexler salutes throughout *Under a Painted Sky*. Commemorated too are Blossom Dearie, Shirley Horn and Jeri Southern with, respectively, a tender "Don't Wait Too Long," a perspicacious "The Great City" and a sly "An Occasional Man." But the most intriguing nod is to Carmen McRae, with the gorgeously melancholy "Last Time for Love," an obscure McRae composition that richly deserves such adroit recrudescence. Additionally, Wexler re-imagines the decades-old Johnny Mathis hit "Wonderful Wonderful" as a carefree ode to joy, snuggles "Till There Was You" in folds of sweet satisfaction, Irene Krall, Annie Ross and Abbey Lincoln.

"I really try to learn from Shirley Horn, her use of space and material," Wexler says. "I'm so interested in finding new songs to share with people that aren't the same 50 standards that everybody hears all the time."

Detroit Free Press

by Mark Stryke

"West Coast jazz singer Judy Wexler has a lithe and limber voice, an improvisatory attitude and an ear for fresh reinventions of standards."

All About Jazz

by Jim Santella

"Blessed to have an ocean's share of jazz singers on board, California remains home to some of the best. When Judy Wexler studied classical piano and then theater, the seeds of jazz had already been sown into her psyche. It was a natural progression: partly because she lived just a block up from San Francisco's legendary Keystone Korner, and partly because the skills that she'd already mastered blend so well into jazz singing. Along with a crew of Southern California jazz stalwarts, Wexler applies her golden-throated soprano voice to this program of melodies with aplomb. Her vocalese marries with Jeff Colella's piano lines on "In Love in Vain" for a spot-on adventure that runs her vocal range from the top of Mount Hollywood to the shores of Sunset Beach. Agile and accurate, she expresses the song's message clearly through its lyrics as well as through her acrobatic binge. She contrasts that varied adventure with "Photograph," which allows her voice to meander solemnly with piano and cello through a torrid affair. Wexler remains equally at ease with a slow ballad as with an up-tempo romp. Throughout the session, she's able to let things run free and natural because her sidemen work so well with her. Double bassist Darek Oles, pianists Colella and Alan Pasqua, drummers Steve Hass and Joe LaBarbera, trumpeter Gilbert Castellanos and saxophonist Bob Sheppard provide mutual support that puts her session on top. Through many portions of her program, Wexler blends her voice with the ensemble as if it were one of the instruments. On "If I Only Had a Brain," for example, she weaves around Sheppard's soprano as if the two were twins. Songs by Elvis Costello, Blossom Dearie, Frank Rosolino and Burt Bacharach complete her program with the strength of jazz lions. From the blue of Hollywood and Vine at midnight to the sand-colored tan of Santa Monica and Malibu, her program reflects the variety that jazz has to offer. By closing with lyrics to "Blue Daniel," she pairs

with Tollak Ollestad's harmonica for a sojourn that guarantees remembrance. Her first album, *Easy on the Heart*, opened the door for this talented jazz singer. *Dreams & Shadows* applies the cement that binds her to an audience fortunate to have her."

EJazzNews (5 Stars)

by John Gilbert

"Since 1999, Judy Wexler has wowed local L.A. audiences with her pitch-perfect vocals sung as jazz should be sung with soul, style, clear articulation and the ability to swing with the best of them.

"Comes Love" and Wexler come on like gangbusters as she takes this tune to new heights with superb phrasing and a message that captures the soul of the listener. Gilbert Castellanos adds some trumpet mastery to the already hot mix. "If I Only Had A Brain" - Judy Wexler tells a musical story on this tune that has not only clever lyrics but a melody that touches the heart. This tune is one of the hallmarks of this album. Jeff Colella at the piano and saxman Bob Sheppard add the final touch to a lovely vocal rendition.

"Bye Bye Country Boy" - Blossom Dearie's soulful tune is smokier than a speakeasy under the supple-as-silk style of Judy Wexler. There is a lot of fertile ground to till on this track and Wexler leaves no stone unturned with this version that would make angels cry.

Bebop is alive and well under the tutelage of Judy Wexler as she parlays "Pent Up House" into a soon to be classic. This singer has all the necessary ingredients and a sense of time that is remarkable. Bob Sheppard's tenor solo is a gem. I remember Judy Wexler from her early years as a very hip singer with all the inherent tools to be a force in the jazz genre...and it's no surprise that she has emerged as just that, a star among stars."

Soundstage!

by Joseph Taylor

"Judy Wexler pulls you into her music with a combination of wit, style and knowingness that must make a lyricist very pleased that she's chosen to interpret his or her words. On top of that, her playful way with a tune and the wonderful fluidity of her voice would make any melodist smile. With her sharp jazz instincts and formidable vocal skills, she knows exactly where to stretch or alter time and when to veer slightly from the melody. *Dreams & Shadows* is her second disc, but it has the confidence and assurance one would expect from a singer with a more extensive discography.

Dreams & Shadows benefits from fresh song choices that smartly highlight Wexler's talents. She covers two songs by Blossom Dearie, warm tributes from her to a fellow singer, and two infrequently covered standards, Harold Arlen's "If I Only Had a Brain" and Jerome Kern's "In Love In Vain." Her take on "Spooky," the '60s hit for the Classics IV, is cool and sexy, and her moving version of "One Less Bell to Answer" avoids the maudlin clichés other singers have fallen prey to. Wexler's readings are dramatic, but she never overwhelms or over emotes.

Wexler is surrounded by very strong musicians throughout *Dreams & Shadows*, including Joe LaBarbera on drums, pianists Alan Pasqua and Jeff Colella, and Bob Sheppard on reeds. Pasqua and Colella have prepared swinging, tasteful arrangements for her and she delivers. Beautifully mastered by Ron McMaster, the sound on *Dreams & Shadows* is very good -- open and expansive. Some buzz seems to be building around Wexler and, for once, it's deserved."

Jersey Jazz

by Joe Lang

"Dreams & Shadows (Jazzed Media) is the second album by vocalist Judy Wexler, but is the first that I have heard. From the evidence here, she is one fine singer, and has surrounded her self with a fine cast of musicians. Pianists Jeff Colella and Alan Pasqua, reedman Bob Sheppard, trumpeter Gilbert Castellanos, bassist Darek Oles and drummers Steve Hass and Joe LaBarbera contribute in various combinations, while Tollak Ollestad on harmonica and Stefanie Fife on cello each appear on one track. Wexler has a distinctive, voice full of shadings, and simply knows how to dig into a song and find its essence. Speaking of songs, Wexler has chosen an interesting and eclectic program. She has mostly stayed away from the catalog of standards favored by most jazz and jazz-influenced pop singers. Even when she goes in that direction, the songs that she opts to include, "Comes Love," "In Love in Vain" and "If I Only Had a Brain," are not anywhere near the overdone category. Her take on "One Less Bell to Answer," makes this song take on a depth that was untapped by the hit version from the Fifth Dimension. It would be hard to find anyone other than Blossom Dearie herself who would include two songs by Dearie and Jack Segal in an album. Well, Wexler sings "Bye, Bye Country Boy" and "Summer Is Gone" in a way that will surely please Miss Blossom. To confirm her jazz chops, Wexler vocalizes two jazz tunes, "Pent Up House" by Sonny Rollins, with a lyric by Jack Prather, and "Blue Daniel" by Frank Rosolino, retitled "Life's a Lesson" by lyricist Ben Sidran. This is an impressive collection by a singer who is sure to attract lots of attention with quality efforts like this."

Primetime A&E

by Nick Bewsey

"Pianist Alan Pasqua also makes an impressive contribution to jazz singer Judy Wexler's exciting Dreams & Shadows, her second CD on the Jazzed Media label, splitting the arranging and playing duties with pianist Jeff Colella. These guys highlight a punchy recording with a strong band presence that includes trumpeter Gilbert Castellanos, saxophonist Bob Sheppard, bassist Darek Oles and drummers Steve Hass and Joe LaBarbera, all of them swift and seasoned musicians. But Dreams & Shadows is Wexler's baby all the way, one that can claim turf on the small landscape of genuinely great modern jazz vocalist recordings. Wexler bites into the lyric of "Comes Love" and doesn't let go, and her band chases after her with the reins of the melody in hand. She slinks through the exotic oldie, "Delilah," and "brings the ruckus" to a swinging interpretation of Sonny Rollins' "Pent Up House." Her eclectic program covers tunes by Elvis Costello and Blossom Dearie, as well as classic material by Jerome Kern and Harold Arlen (a clever version of "If I Only Had a Brain"). This CD puts Wexler solidly among the ranks of the really good singers like Kate McGarry and Tierney Sutton. On Dreams & Shadows she sounds exceedingly relaxed and comfortable throughout, and exhibits just enough fearlessness, daring and control that everything here just clicks."

Pittsburgh Tribune-Review

by Bob Karlovits

"Judy Wexler shows on Dreams & Shadows she has a voice as versatile as her recognition of song is broad. The selections on this album include the 5th Dimension's hit "One Less Bell to Answer," "If I Only Had a Brain" from "The Wizard of Oz," "Almost Blue" by Elvis Costello and the jazz classic "Pent Up House" by Sonny Rollins. Toss in "Photograph" by Brazil's Dori Caymmi and "Spooky" the pop hit from '68, and this album is all over the place. Wexler does them all well, too, with a voice that is strong, but pretty. She even shows some Ella Fitzgerald-like scat-singing on Jerome Kern's "In Love in Vain" and does a vocal version of "Blue Daniel," the jazz classic

"Life's a Lesson." Her excellent efforts are well supported by a band that includes pianist Alan Pasqua, trumpeter Gilbert Castellanos, reed player Bob Sheppard, and even cellist Stefanie Fife on the Caymmi song. This album thrives in understated energy."

Jazz Improv Magazine

by Dave Miele

"These days female jazz vocalists are a hot commodity. That, for good or bad, means they are also something like seven cents a dozen. The unique, if not new, sound of a skilled vocalist with a smokin' combo is everywhere. There is a plethora of new (and old) voices to choose from. How does one decide? You can't get all of the new CDs in search of the gems among the mundane--that's our job. So...perhaps the question should be how do we decide?"

When I receive a CD by a jazz vocalist for review, as I did with Ms. Judy Wexler's *Dreams & Shadows*, the first thing I listen for, of course, is the quality of the singer's voice. Not really can she sing--most who've made it to this level can--but can she achieve the right style? Does she sound relaxed, confident and musical? Can she swing? Ms. Wexler made it through this round with lightning speed. She's definitely got it right; this is the sound I look for.

The next thing I examine is the choice of material. Is it varied? Does it reflect the past, present or future? A little of each? Even better. This leads me to another area--the breadth and width of the singer's capabilities? Does she handle ballads with equal finesse as the more swingin' numbers? Can she display a variety of characteristics with her voice? Is there a sense of humor? Poignancy? Seductiveness? Again, Judy Wexler and *Dreams & Shadows* did not disappoint. The program contains a number of jazz standards, including "Pent Up House," "Comes Love" and the title track, which is perhaps better known among jazz fans as "Delilah," which was of course made famous by the legendary Max Roach/Clifford Brown quintet of the fifties. Wexler's arrangement is a slightly modernized take on Roach and Brown's classic. From the more unorthodox side of things comes "If I Only Had a Brain" (put a check next to that sense of humor question), Burt Bacharach's "One Less Bell to Answer" and Elvis Costello's "Almost Blue." These songs are just some of the highlights of an entertaining thirteen song program.

One final area I examine when reviewing a female jazz vocalist is the quality of her backing band. This was a no-brainer with *Dreams & Shadows*. Big guns like Joe LaBarbera (who does a particularly masterful job with this recording) bolster a long list of talented musicians that support Judy Wexler in a most musically respectful and uniquely engaging fashion. These guys smoke on the swingers and gently glide through ballads, comfortably negotiating everything in between.

With all of my prerequisites met, I can easily say that Judy Wexler is a great singer and *Dreams & Shadows* is a great CD. Glowing reviews are always fun to write, as there's real passion behind my words. This CD is not one to miss. This review will be a blast to write. As the screen just advanced to page two of my Word document entitled "Judy Wexler," I realize that I seem to have already written the review. Go figure. OK, I did my part, now do yours. Go out and get Judy Wexler's *Dreams & Shadows*."

California Tour & Travel

by Chris Walker

"Anyone around before "mix tapes" and I-Pods remembers having exceptional records that tracked well. They became prized possessions, and for jazz listeners those albums were backdrops for engaging conversations, stimulating parties and ahem, other things... Singer Judy

Wexler's *Dreams & Shadows* is reminiscent of a bygone era, beginning with her version of Elvis Costello's "Almost Blue." With stellar rhythm players and dashes of saxophone, trumpet, harmonica (Tollak Ollestad) and cello (Stefanie Fife) she achieves the perfect balance of singer and musicians. Her tonality and delivery are impeccable, especially considering the choice of songs. Often jazz vocalists rely on well-known and worn material that is easy to mold. Wexler differs, instead showing with ingenious arrangements and some of Los Angeles's greatest players -- pianists Alan Pasqua and Jeff Colella, bassist Darek Oles, drummers Steve Hass and Joe LaBarbera, saxophonist Bob Sheppard and trumpeter Gilbert Castellanos -- an uncanny ability to create outstanding jazz."

In Tune International

by Dan Singer

"Judy stays right on top of her 13-song programme of what seems like tailor-made songs chosen just for her. Her distinctive jazz stylings are amazing throughout. The ballad "One Less Bell To Answer" (Bacharach/David) is dreamy and ever so softly crooned. Emotional songs like these are well suited for Judy to dramatically exhibit her classy singing. "Comes Love" (Brown/Steph) swings from start to finish. There is a pair of singer-pianist Blossom Dearie penned ballads. "Bye Bye Country Boy" and "Summer is Gone" are both sung in slow and moody far reaching fashion. The standard "In Love In Vain" (Kern/Robin) actually swings with a laudable scat. It's interesting to hear customary slow ballads swung in daring, chance-taking, uptempo versions. Judy does this evergreen proud. Then there's the clever and hip song "If I Only Had A Brain" (Arlen/Harburg). Judy slowly, but with certainty, makes brand new inroads to this familiar song. The film "Wizard Of Oz" will never be the same for me again."

Jazz Society of Oregon

by George Fendel

"Who was it that once said 'You'll know it when you hear it?' Well, there are those who would strive to be called jazz singers and others who actually may claim the title. Judy Wexler fits in the latter category. And you'll know it when you hear it. Among those qualities which provide the answer: intonation, telling the story of the lyric, phrasing, choice of material, knowing how much improvisation is perfect, hiring hip accompanists, and more. And Judy Wexler is the complete package. She's wonderfully on key (a welcome change of pace in this day and age) and seems to have a natural jazz sensibility interpreting such tunes as "Comes Love," "Almost Blue," "In Love In Vain" and even the Wizard Of Oz opus, "If I Only Had A Brain." A true test for any singer would be the intervals in Sonny Rollins' "Pent Up House." It's child's play for Wexler. Two delightful surprises were "Life's a Lesson" and the title tune. The first of those is better known as "Blue Daniel," Frank Rosolino's lovely waltz, all dressed up with a new lyric. "Dreams & Shadows" is also known as "Delilah," a Victor Young composition long a favorite in the jazz pantheon. Pianist Alan Pasqua leads a group of on-target West Coast cats tailored to Wexler's vocal adventures. She's the real deal ... a jazz singer!"

L.A. Jazz Scene

by Jim Santella

"There are jazz singers who concentrate on musical accuracy, those who concentrate on superb technique, and those who concentrate on you. The best, of course, achieve a balance of all three."

That's Judy Wexler. She loves to interpret the songs so that you feel their meaning deep inside. She does so with the desire of one who wants you to understand. And she rounds out each musical story with strong projection while keeping the musical aspects of her delivery on target.

Vocalese, lyric rendering, blues-laden mystery, and freewheeling cascades: it all comes together in one interesting program, including "Comes Loves," "If I Only Had a Brain," "Pent Up House," "One Less Bell to Answer" and "Blue Daniel." Wexler achieves remarkable camaraderie with her band, which includes pianists Jeff Colella and Alan Pasqua, bassist Darek Oles, drummers Steve Hass and Joe LaBarbera, saxophonist Bob Sheppard and trumpeter Gilbert Castellanos. Everybody has fun.

Elvis Costello's dramatic piece, "Almost Blue," provides Wexler with a lovely opportunity to express feelings that need to be released. The album's title track features bass clarinet and trumpet in a beautiful romp where the singer weaves her exotic charm with impeccable emotional range. Two songs by Blossom Dearie find Wexler swinging lightly with a relaxed rhythmic appeal and spot-on interpretations. With each tune, she turns a lovely lyric into a memorable occasion: the kind that you remember forever with pleasant, old-friends-come-to-celebrate happiness."

Santa Barbara News-Press

by Josef Woodard

"Early jazz influences crept into her consciousness through various sources. "When I grew up, my father had a lot of Ella Fitzgerald and Sarah Vaughan. I grew up with that kind of music. But it wasn't until college that I got deeper into it. My boyfriend had a lot of Chick Corea. I remember Return to Forever. I was turned on by that. Also, I was listening to Dave Brubeck's 'Take Five.' I remember that. After college, I met my husband in San Francisco. We lived in North Beach and he was a huge jazz fan. He turned me onto everybody. I remember, especially with vocal jazz, listening to Lambert, Hendricks and Ross. He turned me onto Eddie Jefferson, and I became a huge vocalese fan at that time. We went to (legendary and now defunct San Francisco jazz club) Keystone Corner all the time and we heard everybody. I remember the seven dollar cover charge -- it was so expensive," she laughs. Moving back to her hometown of L.A., the actor side of Wexler's persona consumed most of her energy, as she worked at working in theater and television. But Wexler admits that "I became completely disenchanted with theater. It really became like hitting your head against the wall. It's very lonely. It's not like music, which doesn't have to be lonely. But theater and acting really can be very lonely."

Wexler expanded on her earlier classical piano studies with jazz piano, training with noted player Terry Trotter, and at Dick Grove School. She started gigging around town and earning the respect of peers. After releasing her debut album, "Easy on the Heart," her musical life heated up. The album, she says, "did really well, considering it was my debut CD. It did well on radio. It opened up some nice performance opportunities. And then this (new) one did really, really well on radio. I've just been working really hard to get out-of-town dates, including the Blue Note in New York in September. It seems like things are happening nicely." She studied psychology and theater in college, and spent years pursuing the latter, but the 21st century Judy Wexler is all about jazz. The Los Angeles-based Wexler recently released her second album, "Dreams & Shadows," following up 2005's "Easy on the Heart," and she's been steadily building a buzz of critical and listener approval. She's got technical chops and expressive ease on her side, and she brings something new to the jazz vocal table.

On Monday night, Wexler makes her Santa Barbara debut at SOHO Restaurant and Music Club, one in a series of impressive jazz vocalists holding down the Monday jazz night fort.

If Wexler has garnered interest and respect for her solid musical values and credibility as a mainstream jazz singer, her tastes in repertoire are anything but straight-ahead or predictable. "Dreams and Shadows" kicks off with a standard, "Comes Love," and the title tune, and also includes a lesser-trodden favorite, Harold Arlen's "If I Only Had a Brain" from "The Wizard of Oz." On the album, Wexler also digs into pianist Alan Pasqua's tasty, jazzed-up arrangement of the Burt Bacharach pop jewel "One Less Bell to Answer." Other high points are Blossom Dearie's "Bye Bye Country Boy" and "Summer is Gone," and Sonny Rollins' "Pent Up House," with a lyric by Jack Prather. Possibly the most impressive treatment is her take on Elvis Costello's "Almost Blue," which he recorded with Chet Baker making a brooding, blue-tinted cameo.

To hear her tell it, on the phone from home in L.A., Wexler's "goal as a musician" is to "try and find tunes that aren't done to death. Certain tunes I kind of never want to hear unless they're deranged," she says with a hearty laugh. "That's kind of what drives me, just finding the cool tunes. Also, it's about working with these unbelievable people. I feel lucky."

Of singers on the scene at the moment, Wexler comments, not surprisingly, that "I love singers that have a modern approach. Kate (McGarry, who played SOhO recently) is one of them. I love Sunny Wilkinson, a great singer. I love Roseanna Vitro and have been a fan of hers forever. Esperanza Spalding is really hot on the scene now. What I've heard, I really like. She seems so joyful. I also really like Sara Gazarek. Her voice is just so spot-on. Her expression is really lovely, and I like her material."

Material is a material issue with this artist. Wexler, whose professional jazz career is less than a decade old, and whose recording career goes back only to 2005, may have an advantage in having entered the field as a fully-developed adult artist, with a fresh attitude intact. She says, "I just haven't been turned on by stuff that I've heard everybody do over and over again. Maybe I started by learning standards and as I kept trying to find tunes, I became attracted to the tunes that weren't just the same old, same old."

Santa Barbara Independent

by Josef Woodard

"Jazz singer Judy Wexler has been warming up the Los Angeles scene, going back to the late '90s. After spending years in the theater and acting game, she slowly succumbed to the jazz muse, but fell in love deeply. It happens. Jazz can be a lifelong affliction, for listeners and artists alike, even when the money prospects are slim. Art will out.

On Monday, the impressive spate of jazz vocalists at SOhO this summer continues with Wexler's Santa Barbara debut. Wexler recently released her second album, *Dreams & Shadows* (Jazzed Media), a follow-up to her 2005 debut, *Easy on the Heart*, and both albums project technical and emotional intelligence, and a stubborn and admirable will to avoid the obvious. On her new one, aided by pianist-arrangers Alan Pasqua and Jeff Colella, Wexler flirts with a few non-standard standards, and tastefully, but makes a stronger impact taking on Burt Bacharach's "One Less Bell to Answer" or Elvis Costello's aptly named anthem to romantic ambivalence "Almost Blue." Mature and fully-assembled, Wexler is taking her rightful place in the ranks of strong jazz singers on the scene."

Pasadena Weekly

by Bliss

Playing With Time - Jazz Vocalist Judy Wexler Has It Covered

"The subject of how singers claim a song as their own has inspired countless debates over the years. For some it's about the poetry of the lyric; others need to feel a song biographically echoes their own personal lives; while still others cite breath and rhythm as key to finding a path to the heart of a song.

Count Glendale-based jazz vocalist Judy Wexler in the latter category. Her recently released CD "Dreams & Shadows" offers the theater major and sometime actress ample opportunity to swing while she parses emotionally sophisticated lyrics. It also boasts material from numerous musical corners. Too many so-called "jazz" stylists damn themselves to supper-club purgatory by wringing every last pregnant pause and smarmy wink from already overdone standards like "The Look of Love" and "Route 66." True, Wexler's decision to cover Burt Bacharach and Hal David's "One Less Bell to Answer" is unfortunate, despite a lean, intelligent reading that cuts to the meat of what is, essentially, a gracefully phrased lament; the Fifth Dimension's cheesy version is so embedded in the popular consciousness that it's all but impossible to overcome. But Wexler distinguishes herself elsewhere with offbeat choices.

Harold Arlen and E.Y. Harburg's childlike "If I Only Had a Brain" from "The Wizard of Oz" is rendered as a wistful, behind-the-beat confession more sunny than silly, while her light teasing of the lyric to Atlanta Rhythm Section's 1976 hit "Spooky" introduces new immediacy to the minor-key tension drawn out by pianist Alan Pasqua and trumpeter Gilbert Castellanos. Wexler herself keeps vocal drama to a minimum, opting for elegant phrasing over theatricality even when giving forlorn voice to Elvis Costello's "Almost Blue."

She hews closer to traditional jazz tastes when mining the songbooks of Sonny Rollins, Jerome Kern and George Kelly. The latter's "Don't Be on the Outside" was a snappy staple in the repertoire of the late, great Sarah Vaughan, who seems to be a primary touchstone in Wexler's field of influences. Both share a ringing smoothness of tone and an emphasis on direct, almost conversational phrasing. Another significant forbear whose influence can be discerned in Wexler's style is cabaret veteran Blossom Dearie, whose "Bye Bye Country Boy" and "Summer is Gone" (both co-written with Jack Segal) are highlights of "Dreams & Shadows." But while Dearie is sweet and girlish, Wexler is urbane and witty. Where Dearie's influence makes its presence known is in Wexler's rhythmic sense - her innate understanding of rhythm's importance in not just delivering but also defining a song. It's the key to her gift for subtly playing with time."

BLOGCRITICS.ORG

by Jordan Richardson

"Judy Wexler has swing, no question about it. Born and raised in L.A., she studied piano at age 5. Wexler gravitated more towards theatre and acting as she got older and started off in high school productions. In a twist, she majored in psychology at UC Santa Cruz and planned to become a therapist. Eventually, however, Wexler "came back down to earth" and switched her major to theatre after a few years. Still, her education in psychology has been helpful in terms of breaking down her work in theatre and in music. This background makes Wexler one hell of a storyteller and her latest album, Dreams & Shadows, is full of stories and tales. Her previous album, 2005's Easy on the Heart, was well-received and introduced listeners to her ability to use the freedom of jazz to tell such great stories. Wexler's Dreams & Shadows expands on that freedom and gives the listener something different with each well-dressed track.

First things first, though: her band is marvelous. Popping the cork on a bottle of wine and settling into this one as I have, the gentle grooves and taut backing of Wexler's band is something

special. The album's opener, "Comes Love," comes alive with silky backing from the band. Wexler's stretching of certain notes smolders and the song is alluring. With one or two simple notes, I'm intrigued. Judy Wexler can throw down.

The title track, "Dreams & Shadows (Delilah)," is up next. Beginning with the delectable, dark bass tones of Darek Oles and the accompanying piano, Wexler takes this tune in a delightful direction. "In Love In Vain" is a spunky little track with compelling lyrics delivered with unique rhythm and humour. "Photograph" is smoky jazz led by Stefanie Fife's cello and the tender sway of the band.

"Spooky" is actually a rather silly rock song, but it works because Wexler is able to transform the piece with her swing and her swagger. It's a highlight track. Following that, "If I Only Had a Brain" is a dazzling take on the classic Harold Arlen track from Oz. The Elvis Costello tune "Almost Blue" is one of the more sentimental tracks on the album and the opening piano is beautiful and eloquent.

"Bye Bye Country Boy" swings into place next as a song about regret. The Sonny Rollins tune "Pent Up House" is a full-on blast of gorgeous jazz and Burt Bacharach's "One Less Bell to Answer" slows things down again. Wexler takes on the bluesy "Don't Be On the Outside," originally recorded by Sarah Vaughan in the 50s, with style. "Summer Is Gone," by Blossom Dearie, and "Life's a Lesson" nicely close out the album.

Judy Wexler can throw down, that much is clear.

But what's more, she has that certain indefinable notion for timing and an uncanny ability to tell stories with natural swagger and swing. Swing is often lost in music because it can't be taught. It's an attitude. Yet here is Judy Wexler and she simply has it. For her, the swagger comes naturally and the breathy swing is simply instinctual. Something tells me that she couldn't turn it off if she tried. Dreams & Shadows is a great place to start getting to know this wonderful jazz vocalist."

Midwest Record

by Chris Spector

"Here's a thrush that knows how to sing and swing like a throwback to the golden age of broads. Saucy, sexy with great tone and style, she's selling the steak and not just the sizzle. A jazz vocalist for this or any season, Wexler hits it on some intuitive, innate level that just makes you a fan right out of the box. Hot stuff throughout."

Toledo Blade

by Tom Henry

"L.A.-born singer Judy Wexler is a theater hopeful who spent time in the San Francisco Bay area and even landed a guest appearance on Frasier before gravitating to jazz several years ago. Good thing. She's a great fit for the genre rhythmically and stylistically, with a heartfelt, bop-oriented voice.

On this disc she's again paired with one of the pianists on her debut album, Alan Pasqua, and she is surrounded by a strong cast of musicians on bass, drums, sax, trumpet, harmonica, and cello.

Highlights include her smooth jazzy take on the famous Ray Bolger scarecrow solo from the Wizard of Oz, "If I Only Had a Brain," as well as her deft covers of Burt Bacharach, Sonny Rollins, and Elvis Costello hits."

Riveting Riffs

by Joe Montague

"Jazz vocalist Judy Wexler delivers a spooky performance on her new CD, *Dreams & Shadows*. On the fifth track, she adapts the Buddy Buie/James Cobb Jr./Harry Middlebrooks/Mike Shapiro, light rock song "Spooky," which was made popular by Dusty Springfield in the 1960's. Gilbert Castellanos' soulful trumpet introduces the new arrangement, and one of my favorite bassists, Darek Oles, establishes a deep, rich bassline. Backed by some superb work by percussionist Steve Hass, Wexler serves up a flirtatious, sexy interpretation that would bring a smile to the late Dusty Springfield's face. Some singers tend to think slurring their phrases makes them sound sexier. Personally, I think it makes them sound inebriated. Mercifully, Wexler delivers clear phrases, without sacrificing any of the emotion. Her voice is pretty, and she demonstrates great vocal range, particularly on the last few lines of "Spooky."

Wexler turns next to one of America's most prolific composers, Harold Arlen, and his song, "If I Only Had A Brain," from the movie, *The Wizard Of Oz*. Wexler's soaring vocals are infused with the same joy that I recall as a child, and Ray Bolger's character, the Scarecrow, first sang the tune in the movie. Arlen's reputation as a composer was recognized by the Recording Industry Association of America when they named "Somewhere Over The Rainbow," as the twentieth century's number one song. Wexler is hauntingly lonely, while singing the Fifth Dimension's "One Less Bell To Answer," (written by Burt Bacharach/Hal David). While the singer mourns the loss of a love that has slipped away, "One less bell to answer / One less egg to fry / One less man to pick up after / no more laughter," I was wondering when the years had slipped away, and now an entire generation or more are hearing some of the great songs from the sixties and seventies for the first time. The singer's phrasing evokes vivid scenes, particularly when it comes to the imagery of a doorbell ringing which incites both expectation and hope that the one you lost will be standing at the door.

Wexler becomes a siren with her rendition of the Blossom Dearie/Jack Segal song, "Bye, Bye Country Boy," a ballad about a singer who performs at county fairs and meets up with an adoring male fan, with whom she shares a tryst. Oles' solo acts as a bridge, before Wexler's vocals signal resignation, as the singer realizes she is saying goodbye forever to a man whom she wished had convinced her to stay.

In her interview with Susan Stamberg of NPR, Wexler confessed to preparing for Sonny Rollins' lightening fast, "Pent Up House," by singing the lyrics over and over again. Any stay at home parent, with kids crying in the background, laundry to do, meals to prepare and just trying to find a few quiet moments, will either smile and nod at the realistic depiction in this song, or cringe at the reminders. Rollins (tenor saxophone) first recorded the hard bop song in 1956 with trumpeter Clifford Brown and drummer Max Roach.

Another memorable moment from Judy Wexler's *Dreams & Shadows*, comes in the form of her lamenting vocals, as she sings Elvis Costello's, "Almost Blue," while accompanied by Gilbert Castellanos' mournful, muted trumpet. *Riveting Riffs* gives Judy Wexler two thumbs up for her album *Dreams & Shadows*. If you want to hear a great vocal performance from a versatile artist who is accompanied by some equally talented by musicians, then make sure you purchase this CD.

EASY ON THE HEART

Jazz Times Magazine

Harvey Siders

"If Ms. Wexler had written the inscription on the Statue of Liberty, it would have read "Give me your obscure, your neglected love songs..." She scores heavily by collecting rarities from Kern, Berlin, Mancini, Lennon/McCartney, Abbey Lincoln, Bob Dylan, and Charlie Haden for the title tune. This debut album is simply sensational. Wexler emerges as one of the most focused, unpretentious, no-nonsense, bop-oriented jazz singers around. She boasts range, firm intonation and the kind of enunciation that makes her the darling of lyricists. The highlight is Victor Young's "Beautiful Love," not in its present incarnation, but morphed into the hipper "Gorgeous Creature," Meredith D'Ambrosio's witty "paraphrase" (her description) of Young's flowing melody. The track is climaxed by Wexler's sweeping 13-to-11 cadence with all the confidence and precision of an instrumentalist. The polar extreme is realized when Wexler descends to a breathy, sensuous low F to end the next track, "Tell Him I Said Hello." That last word will haunt you."

SEATTLE TIMES

By Paul de Barro

Latecomer to singing well worth the wait

After a phone interview with the fabulous new Los Angeles vocalist Judy Wexler, she sent me an e-mail of her five favorite jazz-vocal albums.

Wexler had no idea I was going to print her list, but I thought it would give you a good idea just how hip she is:

1. "Bittersweet," Carmen McRae
2. "Better Than Anything," Irene Kral (with the Junior Mance Trio)
3. "Annie Ross Sings a Song with Mulligan"
4. "Social Call," Betty Carter
5. (Tossup) "Wholly Earth" or "You Gotta Pay the Band," Abbey Lincoln

Wexler plays Tula's at 8:30 p.m. Saturday with Karen Hammack (piano), Chris Symer (bass) and Eric Eagle (drums) (\$12; 206-443-4221; www.tulas.com).

Wexler's "desert island discs" were no huge surprise, given her cool repertoire and dazzling technique on "Easy on the Heart," her debut CD. The Ross influence, for example, was easy to call, given the sassy inflections on her vocalese solo on "Gorgeous Creatures," a solo originally written by Meredith D'Ambrosio. McRae is lurking about, too, in Wexler's curt attack and sweet-and-sour, vibratoless tone, on Charlie Haden's moonlit ballad, "Easy on the Heart." Lincoln was a no-brainer, since Wexler sings her "I'm in Love" on the album. The cool blue of Kral and Carter are all over the disc, too.

Wexler came to jazz singing late in life, after a first career as an actress (including an episode of "Frasier.") Having grown up playing classical piano, she studied jazz piano with Los Angeles' fabled teacher Dick Grove. "I practiced hours and hours a day," she said, "but what I really wanted to do was sing. I figured, 'I'm going to be 100 years old before I'm good enough to accompany myself,' so I decided to focus on singing."

Hollywood's loss was jazz's gain.

Wexler sang her first gig in 1999 at a French restaurant and held her CD release party earlier this year at the Vic, Santa Monica's exclusive "speakeasy" in an old Victorian house. In some ways,

Wexler reminds me of Seattle's Kelley Johnson, in that she manages to be crisp and accurate at the same time she's earthy and bluesy.

Wexler gives the Henry Mancini classic "Moment to Moment" the Coltrane treatment, complete with throbbing, 6/4-time undertow. This arrangement, like the others on the album, was done by pianist Alan Pasqua, whose playing credits include Tony Williams and Bob Dylan. "I just love his treatment," said Wexler. "He conceived that whole deal in about two seconds, then he said, 'I'm going to steal it for my own group.' " (He didn't.)

No question Wexler can swing, either, especially when she rips into Oscar Brown Jr.'s irresistible classic "Humdrum Blues." "That's a real crowd-pleaser," she said. The whole show ought to be.

Jazziz Magazine

Scott Yanow

"A popular singer based in the Los Angeles area, Judy Wexler has performed regularly in clubs for several years, but *Easy on the Heart* is her debut CD. Earlier in her life, she studied classical piano and worked as an actress before jazz and singing came to dominate her time.

Produced by Barbara Brighton, *Easy on the Heart* has one memorable performance after another. The repertoire is filled with superior obscurities and occasional standards, with highlights including Henry Mancini's "Moment to Moment," Oscar Brown's "Humdrum Blues," a touching "Tell Him I Said Hello," and "Down Here on the Ground." The arrangements expertly utilize pianist Alan Pasqua's trio (with bassist Darek Oles and drummer Tim Pleasant), Bob Sheppard's reeds (which include bass clarinet and soprano), and trumpeter Steven Campos.

All About Jazz

Germein Linares

"Singer Judy Wexler makes her recording debut on Rhombus' *Easy on the Heart*. Wexler is quickly becoming a staple of the Los Angeles jazz scene and, like other jazz artists in Southern California, deserving of better recognition. Joining her are other L.A. jazz stalwarts like saxophonist Bob Sheppard, pianist Alan Pasqua (former member of Tony Williams' Lifetime), bassist Darek Oles and trumpeter Steven Campos. Instead of the usual standards, Wexler does well by choosing some lesser known jazz songs, as well as a couple of pop tunes. Her assertive, no-frills delivery is a dominant and pleasant feature in her singing, as it focuses our attention on the clear and lucid storytelling. The extras in her style are subtle, delicate, well-timed, purposeful and a testament to her good taste. Playful and lovely, songs like "Nobody Else But Me," and Oscar Brown Jr.'s "Humdrum Blues" are nicely countered with more morose features like Abbey Lincoln's "I'm in Love," and the album's best piece, "Tell Him I Said Hello." Wexler's forte is jazz, though she delves into pop tunes like the Beatles' "In My Life" and Bob Dylan's "Don't Think Twice." Both are satisfactory, though they lack the dynamic range of the livelier jazz fare. On the album's final offering, for example, Irving Berlin's "I Got Lost in His Arms," she clearly knows what liberties to take, what lines to stretch and, more importantly, how to enchant us fully."

**Public Radio International -- Jim Wilke's Jazz After Hours
Easy on the Heart -- Best of 2005 Vocal CDs!**

Los Angeles Daily News

Steven Rosenberg

"Wexler doesn't play the debut-disc game of most jazz vocalists by packing the playlist with ringers. Instead, this subtly powerful Glendale singer offers a satisfyingly challenging program of lesser-known gems by Berlin, Mancini and Kern/Hammerstein -- even taking on Lalo Schifrin's "Down Here on the Ground" (from "Cool Hand Luke") and items from Bob Dylan and the Beatles. Wexler also proves she can handle bebop (Meredith D'Ambrosio's "Georgeous Creature") and deliver the blues (with an Oscar Brown Jr. cover, no less). The one constant: a spot-on, expressive voice. Adding to her credibility is the flawless support of Alan Pasqua (piano), Darek Oles (bass) and Tim Pleasant (drums), plus Bob Sheppard (reeds) and Steven Campos (trumpet)."

All Music Guide

Alex Henderson

"In the jazz world, there is a joke that goes like this: how many vocalists does it take to sing "My Funny Valentine"? All of them. That joke is a response to what can be called the "warhorse factor"-that is, improvisers who stick to the most overdone Tin Pan Alley warhorses and don't do anything unusual with them (something that instrumentalists and singers are both guilty of). It isn't that the improvisers are performing bad material; no one is saying that "My Funny Valentine" and "Our Love Is Here to Stay" aren't great songs, but they're songs that have been totally beaten to death-and the fact is that jazz artists who perform warhorses exclusively are just plain lazy. Well, no one will accuse Judy Wexler's debut album, *Easy on the Heart*, of being plagued by the warhorse factor. The California vocalist obviously realizes that worthwhile songs don't just come from Tin Pan Alley, and she successfully brings her interpretive powers to everything from Bob Dylan's "Don't Think Twice, It's Alright," the Beatles' "In My Life" and Henry Mancini's "Moment to Moment" to Abbey Lincoln's "I'm in Love." Wexler includes some Tin Pan Alley material as well-most notably, Jerome Kern's "Nobody Else But Me" and Irving Berlin's "I Got Lost in His Arms"-but even then, she doesn't go for the beaten-to-death warhorses. Of course, having an interesting, far-reaching repertoire wouldn't mean much if Wexler couldn't sing-and thankfully, she has a big, appealing voice and a healthy sense of swing to go with her broad-minded song selection. Hard-swinging but with a definite romantic streak, Wexler is someone admirers of Abbey Lincoln or Dianne Reeves should have no problem getting into-and she's someone who shows a lot of promise on her memorable debut album."

All About Jazz

Michael Gladstone

"This is one special jazz vocal debut album from Los Angeles area-based Judy Wexler. Thirteen well chosen tunes reflect a wide spectrum of popular music, and nary a one can be accused of being over-exposed over the decades. Judy Wexler displays a fine instinct with these tunes, whether from the Great American Songbook or recent compositions waiting to be placed in that category, as well as offerings from Lennon/McCartney and Bob Dylan. Wexler makes great work of the ballads, like Abbey Lincoln's "I'm In Love" and the delicious Berlin tune "I Got Lost In His Arms," as well as the title tune from Fisher and Segal. And she can really swing uptempo, as proven on Oscar Brown's tuneful "Humdrum Blues," featuring a Bob Sheppard bass clarinet solo; Sheppard then switches to tenor sax on Kern's "Nobody Else But Me." Victor Young's "Beautiful Love," usually done as a ballad, appears here at midtempo with tasty piano work by Alan Pasqua. Also, the 1960s tune "Down Here On The Ground," lifted from the film *Cool Hand Luke* and now a

jazz standard, is also taken in a midtempo groove and features a Steven Campos trumpet solo. This album stands miles ahead in the proliferating femme jazz vocal field. I can only hope that it will find its way to the in-baskets of the various jazz radio programmers, and fast!" Alex Henderson

Jazz Improv Magazine

MJ Territo

"Listening to Judy Wexler's *Easy on the Heart* is like being at a dinner party where you meet a lot of people you'd like to know better. Wexler is a gracious hostesswarm and relaxed--and the evening moves along smoothly, without pretensions or affectations. Some of the songs she serves up are familiar, but none are in any way overdone; others are downright surprising, but delicious nonetheless. Alex Henderson

The two surprises on this CD are the Beatles' "In My Life" and Bob Dylan's "Don't Think Twice, It's All Right". In Wexler's interpretations, they fit right in with the traditionally jazz-oriented choices. She stretches the melodies on both tunes, but doesn't pull them out of shape just for the sake of turning them into "jazz". She stays true to the lyrics and intent of both songs, but allowing the listener to hear them in a different way. Alex Henderson

I appreciated being introduced to some tunes I hadn't heard before, especially "Love Is A Necessary Evil" (M. Fisher/J. Segal) and "Down Here on the Ground" (L. Schiffrin/G. Garnett). On "Love" Wexler takes a what-can-a-girl-do stance as she delivers the clever lyric; you can imagine her grinning and shrugging her shoulders as considers love: "Who needs it? No one but the whole human race." There is more good humor in "Down Here", with Wexler wanting to fly with the birds but accepting that her yearning is a metaphor for getting something better out of life. Alex Henderson

The arrangements by Alan Pasqua, as well as all the musicians under his direction, serve the singer admirably, supporting her well but never overwhelming the singer or the songs."

L.A. Jazz Scene, April 2005

"With her debut CD, Judy Wexler finally unlocks the secret that she's been keeping hidden while performing for local audiences at venues around town. Jim Santella Her warm, expressive vocal interpretations give the session plenty to love. Songs by Abbey Lincoln, Oscar Brown, Jr., Bob Dylan, Lennon & McCartney, and Henry Mancini offer variety, as she sings 'em with heartfelt emotion. With pianist Alan Pasqua, bassist Darek Oles, drummer Tim Pleasant, saxophonist Bob Sheppard and trumpeter Steve Campos, Wexler forges ahead into straight-ahead territory with her own personal stamp on each arrangement. The result is a lively session that's filled with the spirit of the blues and the swinging rhythms of jazz.

'In My Life' echoes gently with strong emotions, as Wexler bares her soul with a natural ease. A soprano solo by Sheppard and a bass solo from Oles give the arrangement a hearty appeal. But it's the singer's vocal clarity, driving passion, and down to earth interpretations that make her debut a sure winner. Alan Pasqua lends a powerful force from the piano bench. His sensitive portrayal of 'Tell Him I Said Hello' and the rollicking Latin sparkle that he puts into 'If You Could Love Me' add a significant dimension to the session.

Wexler sings 'I Got Lost in His Arms' with the kind of bubbling enthusiasm that could transform any bossa nova into a romantic adventure. Pasqua and Oles provide a searing assist. 'Love is a Necessary Evil' offers a blase look at our everyday experiences. For this swinging arrangement, Sheppard adds a suave tenor solo that complements the singer's personal testimony. Her candid interpretation puts you there, right in the middle of this song's perplexing lyrics. 'Humdrum Blues,'

a personal favorite, allows for more emotional release than on most of this highly recommended program. Wexler convinces with a natural aura and a musically superior ambience."

L.A. Jazz Scene

Scott Yanow

"Judy Wexler has long been a popular performer around town, singing standards and superior obscurities with sensitivity and understated swing. Her debut CD, *Easy On The Heart*, is even better than expected for her voice is heard at its warmest, the material is superior, the arrangements are inventive, and the band is top-notch. There are times during this set where Ms. Wexler sounds a little like Kitty Margolis, particularly when she holds on to her lower notes. But otherwise she sounds distinctive, putting her own stamp on the music. Joined by a modern jazz combo comprised of pianist Alan Pasqua, Bob Sheppard on reeds, trumpeter Steven Campos, bassist Darek Oles and drummer Tim Pleasant, she mostly avoids standards in favor of lesser-known material that is well worth reviving. Among the highlights are Henry Mancini's "Moment To Moment," Oscar Brown Jr.'s "Humdrum Blues," "Tell Him I Said Hello" and "Down Here On The Ground" but there is not a throwaway among the 13 selections. Even such unlikely material as the Beatles' "In My Life" and Bob Dylan's "Don't Think Twice, It's All Right" work well. And Judy Wexler handles the tricky lyrics of Meredith D'Ambrosio's "Gorgeous Creature" (sung over the chords of "Beautiful Love") flawlessly.

Produced by Barbara Brighton, *Easy On The Heart* is a complete success. It is available from www.judywexler.com."

SoundsOfTimelessJazz.com

Paula Edelstein

"Jazz vocalist Judy Wexler sings an exceptional set on her latest release *Easy on the Heart*. Accompanied by Alan Pasqua on piano, Darek Oles on bass, Tim Pleasant on drums, Bob Sheppard on bass clarinet and saxophones, and Steven Campos on trumpet and flugelhorn, the lovely vocalist gives such Great American Songbook standards as "Moment To Moment," "Down Here On The Ground," and Bob Dylan's "Don't Think Twice, It's All Right" a sensitive updated approach. Her interplay with her quintet showcases her deep sense of swing and rich harmonic skills in such a great way as to beautifully enhance her abilities as an entertainer. Wexler has a warm sound, excellent note-for-note phrasing, a winning sense of dynamics and a distinctive style of improvisation that helps to transcend the songs on the recording to another level of appreciation. Overall, Judy Wexler does a great job of exposing her inventive singing and ability to drive the band to both new and current fans. Visit Judy Wexler at <http://www.judywexler.com>"

EJAZZNEWS.COM

John Gilbert

"Judy Wexler has all the necessary ingredients a jazz singer requires and she uses them all in the hallmark of this recording, "Nobody Else But Me." With a rapid fire delivery, Wexler puts this tune in the cosmos, right up there where Hammerstein/Kern reside, and I am sure they are more than pleased. Bob Sheppard has a hip solo on tenor and cleverly sneaks in a "Yes Sir That's My Baby". Tim Pleasant is the boss of this ensemble and drives it like the German rail system...right

on time. Judy Wexler has a voice made for jazz, and I look forward to her next project where hopefully some bop inspired tunes will be at the forefront."

Featured Release on RadioJazz.com

Dr. Mike Matheny

"A debut album this good? Put one of the warmest voices on the planet with Alan Pasqua on the piano and Darek Oles on bass... and the rest is what you would imagine. The voice belongs to Judy Wexler and the release is Easy on the Heart ... in the spotlight this week on RadioJAZZ!

The voice and character of the vocal reveals a depth of expressions. At times what you hear is warm and inviting... she can shift to gutsy and 'blues born'. And then there is the confident delivery on "Nobody Else But Me"... even further, there is another scope of expression on pop tunes such as the Beatles' "In My Life" or Dylan's "Don't Think Twice It's Alright." This album is successful because the talent is real... and someone put the right team together. The producer of Easy on the Heart is Barbara Brighton. Supporting Wexler's vocal magic are Alan Pasqua (piano), Darek Oles (bass), Tim Pleasant (drums), Bob Sheppard (reeds), and Steven Campos (trumpet & flugelhorn). The arrangements, by Pasqua, are tasteful.. they are fresh... and they feature the individual gifts of each performer. Each player gets a well timed turn to keep the flow smooth and emphasize the 'team effort' in production. The composite is masterful."

Kudos from the Composer

Meredith D'Ambrosio

"Your version [of Gorgeous Creature], by the way, is a stroke of genius!"

COZMIK.COM

David Dugle

Judy Wexler's Easy On The Heart draws on roots deep into swing and bebop for a truly outstanding CD. She has been doing stage and TV acting in Los Angeles for quite a few years, but she got earnest about her jazz singing about six years ago. Easy On The Heart is her first CD. It proves she's got the chops and is well on her way to making a lasting name for herself in jazz circles. Some of the more smokily intimate songs seem to be a throwback to the kind of music Dashiell Hammett might have had playing in a jazz club as Sam Spade enters. Obviously adult stuff, it's nothing like the product that passes for soulful R&B these days. Too many popular singers think that warbling is a sign of talent, but Judy goes a more rigorous route, hitting every note cleanly and showing impeccable phrasing regardless of whether she's scatting along in "Nobody Else But Me", or just pouring out her feelings in "Tell Him I Said Hello" or in "Moment To Moment." Her interpretation of John Lennon's "In My Life" will grow on you, but her politely stretched version of Bob Dylan's "Don't Think Twice, It's All Right" may be the top choice for a lot of people. My personal favorite is "Humdrum Blues" which starts off with a Coltrane-ish burst of improvisation and then settles down into an infectious bluesy groove.

The album was arranged by Alan Pasqua, who has dozens of high profile session and touring credits from The Tony Williams Lifetime and numerous jazz outfits to Dylan, Santana and other rock types that stretch well back into the Eighties. Pasqua also contributes masterful piano work all through the CD, displaying a sense for emotional structure that's simply awesome. More directly counterpointing Judy's voice is the lyrical bass clarinet and sax work of Bob Sheppard. Bob is just as well known as Pasqua in music circles for his work with the likes of Chick Corea, Freddie Hubbard and Horace Silver, plus work on countless TV and movie soundtracks.

Rounding out the combo are Steven Campos on trumpet and flugelhorn, a rising star well known around the USC Music School, and veteran session men Darek Oles on bass and Tim Pleasant on drums, who contribute solid work on all cuts. To say "not bad for a first CD" would be a terrible understatement. The only first to associate with Easy On The Heart is "first class".

LIVE PERFORMANCE REVIEWS

L.A. Jazz Scene, September 2006

Glenn Mitchell

Judy Wexler & Jeff Colella Trio at the Lighthouse

"The first jazz club I ever attended when I was young was the Lighthouse in Hermosa Beach. I have many memories through three decades of jazz there, with groups such as the Lighthouse All-Stars, which Howard Rumsey led and played in, together with managing the famous jazz hot spot. There were groups like Cal Tjader, Gerald Wilson's Big Band, Cannonball Adderley and many more. Upon hearing that vocalist Judy Wexler was going to perform there, I decided to go back after being away for many years. This venue still has jazz! Not every day, but usually at least once a week, sometimes more. This particular gig was in the late afternoon into mid-evening.

When I arrived, The Jeff Colella Trio was grooving well on "Days of Wine and Roses," with Colella on keyboards, Harvey Newmark on upright bass and Tim Pleasant on drums. These guys play well together and work quite a bit with Wexler. This was her first appearance at The Lighthouse and with the trio she produced nothing less than wonderful jazz. Wexler has an abundance of well-chosen material and she announces tunes as the show proceeds. "Something Happens To Me" (a gem performed by the late, great Shirley Horn) was a standout, "Devil May Care," "Come Fly With Me" and "Bye Bye Country Boy" (by Blossom Dearie and Jack Segal) were artfully performed.

During "Comes Love," done in medium swing, I noticed Colella's accompaniment was completely seamless and right on the mark. Newmark had a good time doing his bass duties and Pleasant played very relaxed throughout the whole evening. They provided impressive backup for Wexler's mezzo-soprano voice. She gets the audience's attention and holds them right along for the whole ride. Rogers and Hammerstein's "It Might As Well Be Spring" brought the set to a close. Songs like "I Keep Goin' Back to Joe's," "The Lamp is Low," and a favorite of mine, "Beautiful Love," made their way into the second set, as more people came into the club. My favorite tune of the set was "If I Only Had a Brain" from the movie, The Wizard of Oz.

Wexler introduced a visiting friend and songwriter, Martine Tabilio. One of Tabilio's tunes, "Comes the Fall" was sung for the first time by Wexler and it went well, receiving a warm response from the audience. Before leaving, I heard and appreciated the group's rendition of "Another Time, Another Place" by the late, great Benny Carter. Judy Wexler's success continues with a number of exciting engagements. She is making her mark and has a splendid CD out, Easy on the Heart, which is one of the best vocal CD's to be released recently. Her website is www.judywexler.com. Recommended."

L.A. Jazz Scene, June 2005 - Concert Review

Bob Comden

Singer Judy Wexler had her CD release party at The Vic in May... Wexler is a popular singer who has performed around town for many years. She has finally come into her own with the release of her new CD, Easy on the Heart, done for Rhombus Records, produced by Barbara Brighton. The CD is getting a lot of good response, with positive reviews in the L.A. Jazz Scene in the April 2005 issue... Accompanying Wexler were pianist Alan Pasqua, Darek Oles on bass, Matt Otto on tenor sax, Steve Campos on trumpet and drummer Tim Pleasant. They gave Wexler strong

support while shining on their own solo spaces. Wexler likes to sing standards but also tunes that are not heard so often...songs by Abbey Lincoln, Oscar Brown, Jr., Bob Dylan, Lennon & McCartney, Henry Mancini and Lalo Schifrin. She sings with a lot of heart and conviction and puts a lot of emotion into her interpretations. She definitely has her own strong voice.

"Nobody Else But Me" started the set at a lively pace. Wexler sung it beautifully as Otto and Campos added fine solos. "Love is a Necessary Evil" began as a straight-ahead piece, then went into a Latin feel. It was a pretty tune with a sensual piano solo from Pasqua. "Let's Eat Home" is a Dave Frishberg tune that naturally has a lot of humor in it. Wexler handled it well as the group gave it a Latin samba feel. Wexler did a fine job with Bob Dylan's "Don't Think Twice" and Otto and Pasqua provided well thought-out solos. "Down Here on the Ground," written by Lalo Schifrin for the movie, Cool Hand Luke, began with Pasqua's piano intro, then Wexler came in and did a wonderful interpretation... "I Got Lost in His Arms" was done as a bossa nova, and Henry Mancini's "Moment to Moment" closed out the set. The musicians supplied Wexler with marvelous support and she gave a very fine performance. I wish her a lot of success with her new CD."