

JazzTimes

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Judy Wexler
Easy on the Heart
(Rhombus 2005)



"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 in captivity. She boasts range, firm intonation and the kind of enunciation that makes her the darling of lyricists. (Understandably, her basic training was in theater.)

Despite the earlier name-dropping, 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. Kudos to reedman Bob Sheppard for sparkling solos on soprano and tenor saxes, and bass clarinet."