

CD REVIEW: "DON'T LET A GOOD THING GET AWAY"
Doug Boynton, GirlSingers.org

I know more names than I used to, but in the end, I'm a consumer, an end-user, oblivious to even some of the not-so-lesser known names in the music business. So while I probably *should* know composer Michael Leonard's name, an entire album subtitled, "The Music Of Michael Leonard" goes right over my head.

And that's a shame. Because while I don't know the name, I *do* know some of these songs, recorded by people like Barbra Streisand, Nancy Sinatra, and...Maud Hixson.

"Several years ago," she writes in the credits, "I applied to the Minnesota State Arts Board for a grant that would allow me to work with a living composer to explore an entire song catalog and present my discoveries in performance." Two of Mr. Leonard's songs come from the 1965 Broadway musical, "The Yearling," which Mr. Leonard, in a Wall Street Journal interview, called a "total disaster" that ran for only three performances. Yet the Journal author (citing allmusic.com) says the two songs – "I'm All Smiles" and "Why Did I Choose You," have been recorded by others more than 300 times, which qualifies them as "standards" in anyone's book.

The album represents an outstanding group of discoveries, and as usual, Ms. Hixson continues to perform at the very top of her game. She operates at an intimacy level somewhere between cabaret and a larger stage, able to sell each song on its own terms, with that clear, pure voice with which she's handsomely blessed. Of course, the blessing isn't enough. There's also the work to shape it, refine it, hone it. No actor could work these lyrics better, and that is the real art that's going on here. Master craftsmanship.

Pianist Tex Arnold arranges, save for "Where Do The Lonely Go," arranged by Gene Bertoncini, who also plays guitar. Good arrangers know how to frame the vocalist, not compete. These guys are good. They're joined by Warren Vaché on cornet, and Steve LaSpina on bass.

So yes, I'll like the songs with which I'm most familiar – the two I've mentioned, along with the wry "Not Exactly Paris," originally written for Margaret Whiting; and just like listening to the radio when I was a kid, I'll get to like the others, too. Because this disc will be in heavy 'pod rotation for a while.

I don't have to know all about Michael Leonard to know what's good. You had me at Maud Hixson. This disc is very highly recommended.