

## *Don't Let A Good Thing Get Away CD Review*

By Rob Lester, Talkin' Broadway

### **Sound Advice: The captivating Maud Hixson**

With no shouting or showboating, the gentle-voiced, very musical Maud Hixson charms. She makes a good thing out of understatement in *Don't Let a Good Thing Get Away*. Smooth as silk and just as classy, her unruffled way with a melody and lyric is focused and focuses on storytelling and mood. And there's a smile in her voice. It's light, but creamy. The repertoire is all melodies by Michael "Mickey" Leonard, with various lyricists, including four from the wonderful 1965 Broadway score with Herbert Martin's words, *The Yearling*. Although things remain in a land of limited dynamics and discretion rules, it works because her sound is so warm and appealing.

Things rarely become too mellow for too long, largely due to the somewhat contrasting arrangements and generous jazz-inflected, tasty, never-bland instrumental breaks. Pianist Tex Arnold's quartet arrangements can involve complex figures with lots of notes in contrast to the simplicity of Maud's minimalism and mellifluous, simple lines. On first listening, it's sometimes a distracting mismatch, but the wisdom of what comes to feel instead like *complementary* compensation comes to be appreciated. Still, I would have been happy with some sparer choices to keep the vocal spell going. She has a kind of hipness and comfort level with the material that inspires confidence and a desire to follow her in her style and stylings. But these are sublime musicians in their own right who can settle into giving her burnished, muted, moody ambience without ever risking "Easy Listening" blunted blandness. Cornet jazzmaster Warren Vaché is generously spotlighted, becoming a real voice of expanding on established flavors and commenting on them almost like an elucidating narrator with

descriptive footnotes. He gets it. Sterling bassman Steve LaSpina is an excellent choice, very in the groove, seemingly able to come to the forefront or blend in as needed without making the switch jarring. One of the all-time greats of guitar, Gene Bertocini adds immeasurably, even he seems underused at times. But in "Where Do the Lonely Go?" (an earlier Martin lyric), the Gene sheen is front and center with his own arrangement, and it's just glorious.

The album showcases the Leonard library of music in its various shades, but makes it clear that he's been attracted to particularly intelligent, literate lyrics. There's a maturity about many of them that shows characters' self-awareness and a refreshingly adult, lived-in perspective. Cuteness and apple-pie innocence seem to be anathema. This starts with the witty, wordy ways of Broadway veterans Carolyn Leigh on the title song and the trio of lyrics by acerbic and quirky Marshall Barer (best known to some as the lyricist of *Once Upon a Mattress*, but a slyly mischievous poet in other ways). Barer is represented by two premiere recordings: the braggadocio's smug self-congratulations for having an abundance of "Old World Charm"; and a retelling of the innuendo-filled entrapment tale of "The Spider and the Fly." And then there's the wistfulness of a mature person's looking back on the by-far best in a series of underwhelming romantic liaisons with men, one where it was "Not Exactly Paris," but it remains memorable and missed. ("It was not exactly marriage/ Didn't have the longest run ..." runs Russell George's bittersweet lyric.)

*The Yearling's* songs are treated with care, but Maud puts her own stamp on them. The jazzy, circular number that often is expressed as ebulliently playful, "I'm All Smiles," becomes a more conspiratorial private secret of a new love or infatuation. The cut "Growing Up Is Learning to Say Goodbye," recently unveiled on Original Cast Records' *Lost Broadway and More*, is a major highlight, the singer's reading showing a very convincing thoughtfulness and grown-into wisdom. Serenity absent any

burning need for justification of why she loves a longtime partner/spouse makes the score's "The Kind of Man a Woman Needs" and the most-often-recorded "Why Did I Choose You?" feel more reassuring than reflective or revelatory. Lyricist Herbert Martin's well-crafted, but natural-sounding, words are treated with respect and even awe. The same goes for his recounting of a visit to his old home, "Childhood's End," revisiting abandoned playthings and bedroom, recorded here for the first time. It ends a 12-song album I listen to frequently.

Maud Hixson was the opening attraction of Manhattan's new cabaret venue, The Cafe at Broadway on West 53rd Street, and I was happy to see her present the contents of the *Don't Let a Good Thing Get Away* album before a sold-out crowd. Alas, it was only for one night, so I guess we let a good thing get away...for now. I look forward to more Maud.

--Rob Lester