

TIME AND LOVE AND A WHOLE LOT OF JAZZ

JAZZ SINGER/LYRICIST MARK WINKLER TAKES A CHANCE ON THE SONGS OF 60S POP ICON LAURA NYRO

MARK WINKLER'S THE LAURA NYRO PROJECT was released on March 5, 2013.

Although his last three CDs have placed high on the Jazz Week charts, and his lyrics have been regularly recorded by over 150 singers (including Dianne Reeves, Cheryl Bentyne, Jackie Ryan and Bob Dorough,) for his latest work jazz singer and lyricist Mark Winkler has created a new album dedicated to fresh interpretations of the work of his own favorite singer/songwriter: Laura Nyro.

"I love the songs of Laura Nyro", says Winkler. "I am moved by both her music and her words. Her songs create their own worlds, conjuring up cities, cockleshells, exotic lands...and deep passions that touch and inspire me. She mixes Jazz with Broadway and Soul and Folk, and somehow, it all comes out great. I became aware of her brilliance while still a young man living at home with my family. Ever since then, I've had a burning desire to do her music. I decided that, at last, the time is right for me to tackle it...so I set myself the task of finding the "jazz side" of her amazing work. I'm hoping that today's music lovers will discover that her songs are so good that they really deserve a place in the Great American Songbook."

The Laura Nyro Project is not Winkler's first exploration into the musical legacy of another songwriter. His 2003 release *Mark Winkler Sings Bobby Troup* received a four-star review from Allmusic.com, while Jazzreview.com raved: "Even the artist himself (Bobby Troup) would be proud..." In his last release, *Sweet Spot*, Winkler also included interpretations of great songs by other legendary tunesmiths, notably George and Ira Gershwin and Leiber and Stoller. (*Sweet Spot* was named as the #5 Jazz vocal CD of the year by the Jazz Times critic Christopher Loudon in 2011). Still, an attempt to shed new light on an artist with as devoted a fan base as New York-bred Laura Nyro is a brave move for the Los Angeles-based Winkler.

"It has been so interesting—and, at times, frustrating and challenging—to create a Mark Winkler interpretation of Laura Nyro's music", he notes. "The first challenge: Hey, I don't sound anything like her! I am not from the belting, melismatic school—my voice is lighter and more conversational and quite a bit lower. I had to find a way to fit my baritone-ness into her world of soprano side streets and soaring street-corner passions".

The task required collaboration with inspired musicians. Winkler tapped the talents of arranger and SNL Music Director Eli Brueggemann ("simply one of the best musicians I have ever worked with") to finesse nearly half of the CD's 11 tracks. "Eli understood Laura's idiosyncrasies and found parallels for them in the world of Jazz and the Great American Songbook", explains Winkler. "One of my favorite arrangements of his is "Time And Love." When I told him I wanted to turn this mid-tempo shuffle into a ballad, the remarkable musical reference book in his head

led him to turn for inspiration to Ahmad Jamal's arrangement of "Moonlight In Vermont," transcending genres and decades in a musical micro-second."

Many other A-list musicians helped Winkler bring his ideas to fruition...the album is chock full of fine work by the likes of Eric Reed (who supplied his own arrangement and piano for "Billie's Blues" and then plays killer stride on Winkler's offbeat take on Laura's 60s anti-war anthem "Save The Country"), Anthony Wilson (who cools it down with his solo on "Emmie"), and the sons of the original Mills Brothers (who apply their inimitable style to backgrounds on a New Orleans-infused version of "Sweet Blindness"). Saxophonist Bob Sheppard, guitarists Pat Kelly and Larry Koonse and bassist Dan Lutz also made major contributions to this musical adventure.

Prior to his work on ***The Laura Nyro Project***, Winkler had released 11 CDs in the US, developing a substantial fan base of his own. The 2011 release, *Sweet Spot*, led to a feature article on Winkler's work in Jazz Times, which noted that he is "as both vocalist and lyricist, a master weaver of tunes that seem to demand gin, vermouth, a T-Bird convertible and the occasional *femme fatale*". In that same profile, Winkler's sometime singing partner Cheryl Bentyne (of Manhattan Transfer) says "He's a consummate writer, a wonderful interpreter of these incredible songs, and he does it all with wit, charm and warmth". Winkler and Bentyne have been touring around the country in a jazz show paying homage to the creators of the West Coast Cool sound, a recording of which will be released in the fall of 2013.

Besides the writing, singing and touring, there is another aspect of Winkler's career: teaching. He is in his seventh year as a teacher at UCLA Extension, for which he created a course called "Crafting Great Lyrics: A Songwriter's Workshop," which is now one of the most popular courses at the school. In addition, he gives private workshops on how to produce and market Jazz CD's.

Though there is plenty to keep him busy, Winkler plans to devote a lot of time and attention to his ***Laura Nyro Project***. "It's something I've wanted to do for so long, and I was lucky enough to get some of the best people in the business to work with me. I'm proud of this album, and I'm hoping that Laura's legions of fans will welcome it and feel that I have been faithful to her unique and provocative vision".