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# Sweet Spot

## Playing It Cool

### JazzTimes - Christopher Loudon, September 2011

Singer and songwriter Mark Winkler takes his smooth, sharp L.A. vibe to both coasts.

Not since Bobby Troup encouraged an entire generation to motor west has a singer-songwriter so skillfully championed California hipsterism as Mark Winkler has. Like Troup, to whom he paid album-length tribute in 2003, Winkler 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.

These days, Winkler is finding plenty of ways to express his passions for jazz, film noir and Chet Bakeresque sangfroid. His latest album, *Sweet Spot* (Café Pacific), continues an über-hip pattern established over a decade ago with *Tales From Hollywood* and *Easy the Hard Way* and elevated to chilled perfection with 2009's *Till I Get It Right*. Winkler has also teamed with Manhattan Transfer soprano Cheryl Bentley to create the stylishly retro nightclub act *West Coast Cool*. And this September marks the long-anticipated off-Broadway debut of *Play It Cool*, a jazz musical featuring Winkler's lyrics that examines the gay L.A. scene of the 1950s from the perspective of a lesbian chanteuse-turned-cabaret proprietress. "Mark's vast abilities in so many genres of the arts leave me breathless," enthuses Bentley. "He's a consummate writer, a wonderful interpreter of these incredible songs, and he does it all with wit, charm and warmth."

A native Los Angeleno, Winkler comes by his penchants honestly. "My mom was a big-band singer," he explains, "and even though she gave it up to raise a family, she never really abandoned show business. She would stay up all night watching old movies and telling me stories of her band days. She filled me with love for all that. I have a song called 'Son of the Stardust Lady' where I talk about how she gave me that gift. And since we were in Hollywood-I went to junior high with Nat King Cole's daughter Cookie and my family was friends with Tony Curtis' family-the associations were all around us. I love anything film noir. If it's black-and-white and the streets are wet and the women are bad but beautiful, I'll watch."

*Sweet Spot* opens with a classically cool West Coast anthem, André Previn and Paul Francis Webster's "Like Young." It's a song that Winkler first recorded in 2000 for *Easy the Hard Way*. But, he says, "When we were putting together *West Coast Cool*, arranger Eli Brueggemann came up with this great new treatment that I loved, so I figured I'd record it again." The album also includes, "Catch Me If You Can," which has no connection to the Leonardo DiCaprio film or current Broadway hit. "I wrote it," says Winkler, "[with] the [George Clooney] movie *Up in the Air* [in mind], but it's sort of a sequel to the song, 'How to Pack a Suitcase' on *Till I Get It Right*. I have this fantasy about a guy who loves 'em and leaves 'em, and travels from town to town. I picture it being very 1960s."

Among the album's covers are a swinging treatment of "But Not For Me," and the Brill Building gem "On Broadway," both linked to Winkler's childhood. "I was a very strange little boy," he laughs. "I would move from obsession to obsession, and there was a period when I was completely obsessed with 'But Not for Me.' The same with 'On Broadway.' I played the Drifters' record so much that my mom finally screamed, 'You cannot play that song anymore!'"

Sweet Spot also features "Somewhere in Brazil," a hilarious tale of a second-rate singer stuck in a San Fernando Valley dive while dreaming of Rio. And there is a hauntingly beautiful version of Troup's "Their Hearts Were Full of Spring," plus the poignant "Jazz Is a Special Taste," which is featured in Play It Cool.

The musical, written by Winkler's playwright friend Larry Dean Harris with music by Phillip Swann, is set in 1953. It tells the tale of Mary, a once-great vocalist who owns a gay bar off Sunset Boulevard and becomes obsessed with showcasing her new girlfriend, a dazzling singer named Lena. But Lena abandons Mary for a chance at film stardom. Enter a young gay gentleman named Wil, who, fresh off the bus from nowheresville, becomes Mary's hot new protégé. "It shows what it was like to be gay in the '50s, and how hard it was," says Winkler, adding that "Jazz Is a Special Taste" is pivotal because, "it's also about being gay. Jazz and being gay have a lot in common-they're both underground, and most people don't like or understand it."

Though Play It Cool has, in various stages of development, been presented in L.A. and at several theater festivals, Winkler has been working for five years to get a New York production mounted. (At press time, it's slated to run Sept. 2 - Oct. 8 at New York's Acorn Theatre, where Tony-nominated actress Sally Mayes will play Mary.) Director Sharon Rosen, who has been connected with the show since 2005, describes Winkler and Swann's songs as, "incredible. They're fresh. They bring something new to the stage, yet are totally comfortable and memorable. [The show] has a gay storyline, but it's not just for gay audiences. It's universal. It's a love story, and it's about Hollywood, so everyone can relate."

### **Mark Winkler - "Sweet Spot"**

**L.A.Jazz.com - Dee Dee's Jazz Diary**

**Dee Dee McNeill, , October 19, 2011**

"Winkler is known in the Los Angeles area for his playwriting and musical stage work. This CD embraces that side of the artist as well as his jazzy side."

This CD starts out very jazzy with "Like Young" sung in Winkler's inimitable style as Tim Emmons punches a catchy walking bass line. Bob Sheppard's solo and filler lines add zest to a hot, spicy swing tune. Eli Brueggemann is the arranger on this song and plays a mean piano as well. Love the arrangement and this is a great way to start the CD.

Winkler's smoky voice is charismatic on "Catch Me If You Can", another moderate uptempo number with great lyrics and a catchy melody. Winkler & Brueggemann collaborated on this one as composers/lyricists, as well as artists. Winkler features a number of his compositions on this CD that showcases strong songwriting talents.

Barbara Morrison makes a guest appearance on the Cabaret number "Sweet Spot" and it's the title tune as well.

Other favorites are: "This Side of Loving" arranged by Billy Childs and featuring Childs on piano. The melody of this lovely ballad is haunting as the words lament a lost love. Peter White is featured on guitar on the song Winkler co-wrote with David Benoit "Some Other Sunset". Here is a happy, Latin-tinged original that encourages my feet to Cha-cha. I enjoyed Winkler's interpretation of the Bobby Troup song "Their Hearts Were Full of Spring" with only Anthony Wilson accompanying him poignantly on guitar.

Winkler is known in the Los Angeles area for his playwriting and musical stage work. This CD embraces that side of the artist as well as his jazzy side. I would say it showcases his songwriting talents and his cabaret panache. For example, the original composition "Jazz Is A Special Taste" is taken from his musical "Play It Cool" co-written with Phillip Swann, and presented at a bluesy, slow tempo. The closing bonus track "Somewhere in Brazil (East Coast)" is performed tongue-in-cheek and sarcastic about a lounge singer struggling for the audience attention and inadvertently having to remove himself from the chaos around him.

All in all, this is a well-produced endeavor with an entourage of excellent musicians and a platform to showcase Winkler's songs.

### **Bruce Lindsay, All About Jazz, August 12, 2011**

"Over a three-decade career, singer/songwriter Mark Winkler has released more than a dozen albums, and written songs performed by top vocalists including Randy Crawford, Dianne Reeves and Liza Minnelli. On *Sweet Spot* he brings together all of that experience, plus some superb musicians, to create a collection of songs perfect for a late night club performance—or for anytime listening anywhere else, come to think of it."

"Winkler has name-checked Mark Murphy as a particular influence. On *Sweet Spot*, he doesn't quite have Murphy's hipster cool or vocal power, but he does have a talent for storytelling, for interpreting a lyric with flair. He treats the standards with respect, but he's also happy to explore their less usual elements. On the Gershwins' "But Not For Me," which swings beautifully thanks to the superb bass and drums of Tim Emmons and Steve Barnes, Winkler sings the opening verse, something many other singers leave out, and adds a vocalese part written by Georgie Fame."

"Bobby Troup is one of Winkler's favorite songwriters, as his 2003 album *Sings Bobby Troup* (Rhombus Records) testifies. Troup is represented here by "Their Hearts Were Full Of Spring," a melancholy love song with lyrics that could easily descend into self-parody. Winkler, accompanied solely by Anthony Wilson's sparse and empathic guitar, avoids the pitfall, investing the tale with real pathos."

"Winkler's own songs are a delight—often funny, occasionally melancholy but always displaying a sharp way with a lyric, and some wry observation. "Sweet Spot," co-written with Geoffrey Leigh Tozer, is a late night, slightly risqué, blues enlivened by a honking saxophone solo from Bob Sheppard and the funky vocals of Barbara Morrison."

"Somewhere In Brazil (West Coast)" and its close cousin "Somewhere In Brazil (East Coast)" are beautifully observed and humorous stories, sung by Winkler in the role of a cynical and somewhat deluded bar singer. Sheppard's flute adds atmosphere and pianist Eli Brueggmann, credited with "disgruntled guest vocal," cranks up the satire as the weary and even more cynical keyboard player. And anyone who has the effrontery to rhyme "What a square though" with "Astrud Gilberto" deserves praise."

"Winkler's more tender and romantic side comes to the fore on "This Side Of Loving," with Nolan Shaheed's considered and emotive muted trumpet perfectly matching the mood of the song. It's Winkler's ability to move between moods, from romance to up-tempo swing to dry humor and back again, that make *Sweet Spot* such an engaging collection."

**Oscar Brooks, LA Jazz Music Examiner - June 2011, Examiner.com**

"Mark Winkler hits a home run with his new CD Sweet Spot. The CD has a lot of flavor to it. Whether you are in your car or sitting on the patio or in your living room, this is some really enjoyable music to listen to. Winkler produced the CD and has some outstanding musical talent backing him up, including: Barbara Morrison on guest vocals, Eli Brueggemann on piano, Tim Emmons on bass, Steve Barnes on drums, Bob Sheppard on saxophone and flute, Nolan Shaheed on trumpet, Anthony Wilson on guitar, Luis Conte on percussion, Billy Childs on piano and Kim Richmond on saxophone.

There are 12 songs on this CD including a bonus track. They are all very good songs. The songs that stood out for me are: "Sweet Spot" which is the title tune. It features Barbara Morrison on guest vocals. It has a blues kind of a feel to it. "Somewhere in Brazil" (West Coast) is kind of a catchy tune. "After Hours" kind of reminds me of some of the old Boz Scaggs songs. It has a little bit of blues to it and some really good organ playing by Emilio Palame and saxophone work by Sam Riney. Winkler does "On Broadway" which has a nice little jam session with Kim Richmond on tenor sax and Alex Budman on tenor sax and the end of the song. "Some Other Sunset" is a nice tune to listen to over and over. It features Peter White on guitar

Mark Winkler has a likeable singing style and I really like this CD and if you get the chance, please listen and hopefully add it to your collection. I think you will be glad that you did."

**Michael Upchurch, Seattle Times**

"Singer Mark Winkler has come up with a truly addictive jazz-tinged set... Winkler's voice is sometimes a savvy whisper, sometimes warmly tawny. And his collaborators, including Barbara Morrison and pianist Eli Brueggemann, are knockouts."

**Michael C. Bailey- All About Jazz**

"Winkler turns a standard like "But Not For Me" on it's ear...Winkler means business, singing crisply with superb support."

**Don Albert, Newstime Review**

"Winkler's originals are so good they should become standards."

**Joe Lang, Jersey Jazz - Sept. Issue**

"Vocalist Mark Winkler is a witty, hip and swinging singer who possesses the same attributes as a lyricist...a thoroughly winning collection."

**Cheryl Bentyne, Manhattan Transfer**

Mark's vast abilities in so many genres leaves me breathless. He's a consummate writer, a wonderful interpreter of songs, and he does it all with wit, charm and warmth."

**Jordan Richardson, BC Reviews**

"Winkler sings with conclusive humanity, exposing in every phrase a desire to smile and enjoy the art of living to it's fullest. Winkler's writing is magical stuff."

### **Peter La Barbera, The Jazzine**

"Aside from being up there with all the top jazz singers, Mark is a wonderful lyricist. Mark comes from the tradition of Bobby Troup and he has taken that tradition and brought it into the twenty first century."

### **Ejazz News**

"Winkler is simply marvelous on Sweet Spot, a richly melodic album that offers a deliciously sweet and spicy selection of jazz."

### **Rob Lester, Talkin' Broadway**

"Mark Winkler is like hip and like wow and makes old jazz seem like young."

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## **Till I Get It Right**

### **JazzTimes ,May 2009**

"If Mark Murphy is the reigning king of vocal hipsterism, then Mark Winkler ranks directly behind Kurt Elling among heirs apparent. Though the title of Winkler's ninth album echoes his longstanding predilection for self-effacement, better to consider it ironic.

As the jazz cognoscenti are well aware, Winkler has been getting it right for years. As a singer, he mirrors Murphy's arch sophistication while suggesting a amalgam of Curtis Stigers' blithe ingeniousness and Matt Dennis' breezy bonhomie. As a lyricist, he is as consummate a traveler in the world of Dave Frishberg drollness as he is in the land of Cole Porter urbanity.

This time around, Winkler's lyrical skills span 10 tunes (augmented by the sparse, budding beauty of Steve Allen's "Spring is Where You Are" and witty sagacity of Ivan Lins' "Evolution") of dexterous ingenuity. He shapes clever accolades to personal heroes Truman Capote ("Sissies") and Barbra Streisand ("In the Moment", swaps hepcat accolades with Cheryl Bentyne on "Cool", and serves up the deliciously Frishberg-ian "How Can That Make You Fat?" and proves a master of the sweet adieu with "How to Pack a Suitcase."

But it is on a pair of ballads that Winkler shines brightest, seeking silver linings in "You Might As Well Live" and, inspired by a classic slice of Humphrey Bogart film noir, fog-bound in the aftermath of a doomed romance in 'In a Lonely Place'."

### **George W. Harris, [www.jazzweekly.com](http://www.jazzweekly.com)**

"Mark Winkler sets himself apart from other singers in that he is also capable of writing some clever and insightful lyrics, as he demonstrates on this cookin' little album. Combining early Tom Waits and Kenny Rankin in attitude and delivery, yet with a hint of David Frishberg's wit, Winkler sings about topics from

self indulgent diets ("How Can That Make You Fat?") to Truman Capote ("Sissies") without breaking stride. Tunes like the title track, or the clever duet with Cheryl Bentley ("Cool") are the zenith of hip, while his lyrics and delivery on Joshua Redman's "lowercase" is as musically advanced as anything by Kurt Elling. Excellent in delivery, with the timing of a closing relief pitcher, Winkler's music is as timeless as Bass Weejuns."

### **Myna Daniels, April 2009, L.A. Jazz Scene**

"Singer, lyricist Mark Winkler has assembled a first-rate team for his new CD and I'll state it plainly, it's one of the best jazz records I've heard in a long time. "Get it Right" is a snappy tune that gets things off to a roaring start. With his superb lyrics Winkler becomes the hip, knowing swinger. Jamieson Trotter's piano and Hammond B-3 are super and Bob Sheppard's tenor sax adds gutsy punctuation. A truly great jazz tune that singers are going to love; "How Can That Make You Fat?" is a sassy tune that moves with a bluesy cast. The lyrics are hilarious, Winkler's voice warm. "Cool" is a duet with Cheryl Bentley; Winkler and the Manhattan Transfer vocalist use clear, precise enunciation for a cute, mid-temp vocal romp. The late Steve Allen wrote the music and lyrics for "Spring is Where You Are" and it's a beauty. Guitarist Anthony Wilson did the arrangement and his guitar, with Winkler's soft voice is all the lovely tune needs. "lowercase" will please bebop fans, with music written by saxophonist Joshua Redman, lyrics by Lori Barth and Mark Winkler. Bob Sheppard picks up the right mood with his tenor sax as he and Winkler build tension on a stark theme. The CD's rhythm team of Jamieson Trotter- piano, Dan Lutz-bass and drummer Steve Hass do a terrific job backing Winkler, no matter where he is heading.

On "Sissies" Winkler tackles the issue of homosexuality with a song that is funny, intelligent and defiant, which pretty much sums up its subject - Truman Capote, who was all that and more. Plus it swings hot! Winkler's voice is haunting for "In a Lonely Place." The agony of losing someone is well conveyed and Ron Blake's burnished trumpet adds to the poignant mood. Trotter's arrangement and piano are simply gorgeous, Winkler's voice heartfelt. Turning on a dime, "Future Street" conveys a swingy, happy feel. Winkler is above all, the optimist. With music by Ivan Lins, lyrics by Brock Walsh and the arrangement by Wilson, "Evolution" is a spare rendition for guitar and voice. The tune sends the important message, that maybe we can get it right this time. As he sings, "Evolution is a state of mind." "How to Pack a Suitcase" is a humorous story, well told. Dave Frishberg or Mose Allison could easily add this tune to their repertoires. The trio is terrific backing Winkler's friendly, warm voice as he saunters along at a relaxed pace. "In the Moment" with music by Mike Melvoin, arranged by Trotter ( who did most of the arrangements on the CD) is richly melodic and gets stronger as it goes along. Wilson's guitar adds depth and texture. I loved the arrangement, the melody and the upbeat lyrics! A very danceable tune. The CD ends with "You Might As Well Live," which would be a good motto for our current troubled times. With music by Dan Siegel, lyrics by Winkler and Marilyn Harris, the tune ends the CD on a sweet and hopeful note.

Winkler's voice has gotten better and better over the years. He's singing with confidence, grace and maturity. The material is first-rate and he's assembled an enviable team of collaborators. I'll play this CD over and over, for the music itself, and for the smart, stylish lyrics."

### **Jonathan Widran, Music Connection**

"As perfect as a spirited set of (mostly) original contemporary jazz vocals can be. Blending his always witty lyrics (poetry even without the sharp, swinging organic grooves) with crisp, colorful phrasing that are all about the lost art of martini sipping cool, Winkler brings a unique and heartfelt perspective on heartbreak (melancholy/humor), wistful musings on the passage of time and a playful tribute to Capote. Working with some of L.A.'s best jazz sidemen, the Wink explores acoustic jazz with twists of blues, old school R&B and breezy Brazilian." 8 out of 10 Stars

### **Jordan Richardson, April 2009, BlogCritics Magazine**

"Jazz vocalist Mark Winkler sparkles with personality, honesty, sass, and verve all over Till I Get It Right. Filled with plenty of fresh originals and a big ol' slice of attitude, this is one set of songs that will have you smiling and grooving.

Winkler is a gifted vocalist, no question about it. His elocution is enticing, his pacing is refreshing, and his range is undeniable. But more than that, Wink is a chic lyricist with distinct skill, wit, and dashes of pure emotion. When many jazz vocalists are pouring through the Great American Songbook in search of old favourites, he takes risk after risk with his own audacious songs.

Till I Get It Right slides into the Winkler catalogue gracefully as a reminder that great tunes are still being written by today's finest talents and new classics are only a note or two away.

Winkler's vocals are framed with piano by Jamieson Trotter, bass from Dan Lutz, drums from Steve Hass, guitar from Anthony Wilson, Ron Blake's trumpet, and Bob Sheppard's saxophone. The band behind him is inviting, pleasingly pouring through solos and melodies with simple ease. They are never overpowering and make for a nice fit with the vocals.

Winkler is at his best when he ventures out of the norm and plays with different song topics. His bravery is evident as he works through songs like "How To Pack a Suitcase" with Randy Newman style or the Truman Capote-inspired "Sissies."

Winkler addresses food on another silly number merrily called "How Can That Make You Fat?," once again revelling in a Newmansque vibe.

"Cool" is a standout track thanks to Winkler's fantastic interaction with Cheryl Bentley. The tune is a fun conversation, with Cheryl and Mark exchanging opinions on one another over a lively, finger-snapping rhythm.

It's not all cool, swift wit on Till I Get It Right though. "In a Lonely Place" finds Winkler lowering the lights for an intimate performance. His calculated tone, careful presentation, and articulate pronunciation highlight the tune while Blake's muted trumpet dots the darkness with care. "You kiss me and I was born," Mark sings.

"You Might As Well Live" closes the record gently. Winkler notes on his blog that this is his personal favourite tune on the CD. It's a great piece, with the finer points of his voice emerging in the softer moments. There is a real sense of texture and timelessness with this number.

Winkler's ninth studio record, *Till I Get It Right*, finds the vocalist and lyricist continuing his musical journey. Humorous and intimate, witty and classy, brave and vulnerable, Mark Winkler is a truly talented performer well worth the attention."

### **Jazz With a Sense of Humor**

#### **Zan Stewart/The Star-Ledger**

"L.A.-based singer and lyricist Mark Winkler has just released a beguiling CD, "Till I Get it Right" (FreeHam Records). Working with top Angelino instrumental talent, Winkler offers 12 bracing songs, none of them standards, and many written for this recording. The subject matter runs from a portrait of a playful hipster - "Cool" - to the humor of "How Can That Make You Fat?" (both with words penned by Winkler) and the upbeat philosophical bent of Ivan Lins' and Brock Walsh's charming bossa, "Evolution." The leader's winsome tenor delivers these and the rest with a buoyant, inviting slant. Winkler, joined by singer Mary Foster Conklin and a top-notch trio - pianist John Di Martino, bassist Greg Ryan, and drummer Ron Vincent - plays an East coast CD release party Saturday, 9 p.m., at the West Bank Cafe..."

### **Joe Regan, Jr., April 4, 2009, Cabaret Scenes**

#### **Mary Foster Conklin & Mark Winkler - Laurie Beechman Theatre, New York, NY**

A good sized audience of singers and jazz fans attended the New York appearance of West Coast based songwriter/singer Mark Winkler-with Mary Foster Conklin-celebrating the release of Winkler's new CD, *Till I Get It Right*, with musically wired John DiMartino leading a stellar quartet of top jazz musicians (Greg Ryan on bass, Ron Vincent on drums, and Peter Brainin on alto and soprano saxophones). Before Winkler was introduced, Conklin in a sexy red dress (Winkler called it her "bad girl dress, so Ida Lupino") created joy on Joni Mitchell's "Night in the City," a song about celebrating night life in the city, with Brainin rocking boisterously and beautifully on his soprano sax. Winkler, who possesses a jazzy, masculine voice like those of his idols Mark Murphy, Bob Dorough and Dave Frishberg, started full force with the CD's rhythmic title song and then did Troup's "Hungry Man," which has clever rhymes about finding favorite food in cities across the United States ("chop suey in East St. Louis....going to Montana to get a banana split").

Conklin dedicated Winkler's composition "Trio" (with music by Emil Palame) to all the singers in the room. It's about a singer trying to do a late night set when her musicians are drunk, stoned, or missing ("and the sound man is on the spoon"), a lament that singers in the audience like Laurie Kranz, Terese Genecco and Shaynee Rainbolt all related to. A few songs later, Winkler did "Somewhere in Brazil" (music by the music director on the CD, Jamieson Trotter) about trying to sing for a New Jersey lounge crowd who drunkenly mock his every attempt to sing the bossa nova music close to his heart. "In my mind I'm somewhere in Brazil in New Jersey." A section of the song was sung by DiMartino about the other side of the coin, backing up a singer who is flat, all the charts are scrawled in the wrong key, and "thinks he can scat-he can't scat." Both songs were terrific and hysterically funny.

Other clever works performed were "How Can That Make You Fat" (music Louis Durra) about Winkler's persistent diet tries with lists of forbidden food pleasures, and "Cool" (music Marilyn Harris), a hip "Fever"-flavored duet with Conklin. Utilizing her full range, Conklin sultrily sang a Winkler original



(music by Harris) inspired by a Humphrey Bogart-Gloria Grahame film noir, *In a Lonely Place*. The lyrics quote part of the movie's dialogue:

"You kissed me and I was born,  
You loved me and I lived,  
and when the love was over, died a little bit...  
I was lost in a stranger's kiss,  
In a lonely place,  
In a lonely place."

Another movie tribute was "Sissies," a song inspired by the two Truman Capote movies, celebrating Capote as one of the first unashamed homosexuals ("put the out in outrageous...looking like he was gay before it was cool...they don't make sissies like him anymore"). Conklin sexually reprised a song she found on one of Winkler's earlier CDs, "Those Eyes," originally sung by Rosa Passos, with English lyrics by Brock Walsh, about body language speaking louder than lips' words.

Besides "In a Lonely Place," "Trio," and "Somewhere in Brazil," the real find of the evening was Winkler's song from the CD celebrating life at any age, "You Might as Well Live." Calling it his "Sinatra-styled song," Winkler sings very literate lyrics about aging and lost dreams but the message of the beautiful story song is to live your life to the fullest, no matter how often your dreams are shattered, and you'll be surprised how great things can eventually turn out:

"With so much to give,  
you might as well live,  
you might as well live."

"You Might as Well Live" is a song that I think many singers are going to put in their repertoire and make a new GAS standard.

The encore had Winkler, Conklin and each band member riffing on Troup's "Route 66."

### **Susan Frances, [JazzReview.com](http://JazzReview.com)**

"Singer-songwriter Mark Winkler is the perfect combination of Randy Newman's casually hewn swagger and Michael Feinstein's sleek jazz glides. He courts sophistication with the same vigor that he lassos street soul. Winkler's latest release *Till I Get It Right* is a delightful jaunt of springy piano keys, rollicking fields of bopping beats, and alcoves of mystical passages aglow with moonbeams and crystal-studded glitter. Produced by Barbara Brighton, *Till I Get It Right* shows Winkler has indeed gotten it right with original tunes that will have people dancing in the aisles and enjoying a quiet evening in deep contemplation or with the one who pulls at their heart-strings all bundled into one tidy package.

Winkler's lyrics can be as poetically versed as a Robert Frost poem or as blunt as a best friend's words who is looking out for your best interest. His words are direct and cut to the heart of the matter expeditiously. He harbors no disguise when sings, parlaying a flirty zoot-suit jazz vocalese in his duet with singer Cheryl Bentley in "Cool," into bare-naked vulnerability in the balladry trains of "In A Lonely Place" as he admits unashamedly, "I let myself believe you were someone you could never be." He knows how to whoop it up like in the rollicking grooves groomed with quick-step flicking riffs in the title track, and he is prolific at administering a lover's serenade like in "Spring Is Where You Are." He gallivants with confidence along "Future Street" and nips at being cheeky in "How Can That Make You

Fat?" The tropical island-slant in the tendrils flouncing loosely along "Evolution" have a soft breezy sway, and the cool strut of Winkler's vocals in "How To Pack A Suitcase" is lathered in bluesy-soul suds. He saddles steeds of joy and sorrow with sanguine sentimentality and fairness for both. The cocktail jazz coziness of "In The Moment" is brimming with smiling Spanish-flavored guitar chords, and the swanky jazz cuts of "Sissies" cloth is attired with curvaceous saxophone swoops.

Singer-songwriter Mark Winkler cuts to the heart of the matter in the songs on *Till I Get It Right*. With all original tracks, the album has a flesh and blood feel to it, like these tunes were not imagined but actually lived in and all a part of someone's private journal. As a listener, you feel like a voyeur privy to someone's life and learning from it. The music shimmies and shakes with springs under its feet, and Winkler adjusts his vocals to its coordinates. It's a true fit for lyrics that have meaning in its soles. Winkler touts "feeling lucky" in "Future Street," and indeed he is for having made an album like this."

### **Jonathan Widran, JAZZIZ**

"If 'Till I Get It Right,' the title of Mark Winkler's first disc since the wonderful 'Sings Bobby Troup' and first U.S. released set of originals since 'Easy The Hard Way,' is something of a question, its answer is an emphatic: Get it right? How about perfect! Always sly and cool yet passionate as a vocalist, his wonderfully compelling, distinctively vivid lyrics tell tales that are clever and witty one minute, lovelorn and heartbreaking the next. Working with a wide range of musical collaborators, from Eli Brueggemann and Marilyn Harris to Joshua Redman, Mike Melvoin and Dan Siegel, Winkler explores his love of jazz deeply but delves with equal joy into pop, blues and Brazilian territory. 'Till I Get It Right' does just that, adding another magical destination in the Wonderful World of Winkler."

### **Ralph A. Miriello, jazz.com**

"On Joshua Redman's "lowercase," Mark Winkler demonstrates his smooth and undulating vocal style. He sings the self-penned lyrics in perfect cadence with the song's musical meter. With a tip of his hat to vocalist and apparent inspiration Mark Murphy, who wrote the liner notes in true hipster style, Winkler is at once derivative yet original. Much like Murphy, he chooses challenging and unique material, with lyrics that bring a sly smile to your face for somehow being in the know. As an educator, he has taught songwriting classes at UCLA; so it's no surprise that he has a way with fitting just the right words to compelling music. His nonchalant delivery is deceptive because of the ease with which he modulates his voice. The musicians are first-rate, and complement his lead with understated elegance and impeccable time. Bob Sheppard is particularly effective with his fine tenor work that feeds off Winkler's vocal direction. After solos by pianist Jamieson Trotter and Sheppard, we return to the melody before the tune closes with a repeating refrain from Trotter that fades into a rolling drum solo by Steve Hass. This is vocal jazz at its best.

With the smooth swagger of Gene Kelly dancing through the wet streets in *Singin' in the Rain*, Mark Winkler exercises his lyrical and vocal chops on "Cool." He is joined in duet by an icy-hot Cheryl Bentyne trading lines to this decidedly chilled piece of "hip" music. With the snap of his fingers to the time of the laid-back beat, and Dan Lutz's smoky basslines coming up the rear, Winkler slyly makes reference to (Henry) Mancini and (Chet) Baker in his lyrics as examples of cool. With the wink of someone in the know, saxophonist Bob Sheppard takes the clue and interjects a line from the Mancini Pink Panther songbook to punctuate the matter. A nice bass solo by Lutz leads into a Getzian-cool tenor solo by Sheppard that accentuates the mood of unabashed indifference yet somehow still cooks. Bentyne does some fine vocalizing at the end, showing her range. Winkler plays creatively with the whole concept of what is cool and what is not, and creates a very enjoyable piece of music. Mark Winkler, to take a line from your lyrics, 'You're swimming-pool cool!'"

### **Edward Blanco, eJazznews**

"An unconventional vocalist, veteran jazz singer Mark Winkler doesn't like singing the standards preferring originals instead and that's exactly what you get with his first release since his acclaimed 2003 CD, "Mark Winkler Sings Bobby Troup." On "Till I Get It Right," Winkler presents twelve breezy and swinging new songs sharing vocals with Cheryl Bentley and backed up by the likes of saxophonist great Bob Sheppard, guitarist Anthony Wilson and trumpeter Ron Blake - all heavy hitters in the jazz world providing support for pianist Jaimie Trotter, Dan Lutz on bass and Steve Hass on the drums.

The stellar musical cast allows for many instrumental solos helping the singer deliver the lyrics in boppish fashion. This is certainly an album for those who favor vocal jazz with a measure of spice, for Winkler's crisp deep-throated sound is well suited for the jazz genre. The highlights here are many, from the opening title track to his duet with Bentley ("Cool"), to the playful audacious "Sissies," the music is entertaining and engaging. The vocalist shows a softer side of himself with an emotional performance of the light "In A Lonely Place" featuring trumpeter Blake on a marvelous phrasing and the beautiful dark-toned "You Might As Well Live."

Well worth the spins of enjoyment you'll get out of "Till I Get It Right" because essentially, Mark Winkler does get it right with good charts, an excellent crew and a first-rate performance. Highly recommended."

### **Jonathan Widran, AllMusicGuide**

"Get it right? How about darn near as perfect as a spirited set of (mostly) original contemporary jazz vocals can be? Blending his always sly, witty lyrics - which can be enjoyed as poetry even without the sharp, swinging organic grooves - with crisp, colorful phrasing that's truly the epitome of martini sipping cool, the passionate vocalist brings to his first set of originals in eight years the kind of panache much better known artists can only try to emulate. The world of Winkler is filled with the perfect dual perspective on heartbreak -- he's seriously melancholy on the stark and resigned "In a Lonely Place" and finds humor amidst the bitter on a vocal version of Joshua Redman's "lowercase." Winkler then finds the lighter side of leaving on the retro soul-jazz flavored "How to Pack a Suitcase." He also embraces the hope and optimism before the fall on a stripped down guitar-vocal arrangement of Steve Allen's image-rich "Spring Is Where You Are." Dichotomies abound, as the singer ruminates in two unique ways on the speedy passage of time - the high carpe diem energy of "Future Street" and a more graceful, gently wistful reflection on the elegant "You Might As Well Live." The two cleverest jaunts are "Sissies," a charming tribute to Truman Capote and the slightly bluesy, laugh out loud search for an answer to the question "How Can That Make You Fat?" Fans of Winkler's previous album, Sings Bobby Troup, will get this one as something of an inside joke, a rejoinder to the similarly quirky "Hungry Man." One of the reasons Winkler's recordings never miss is the depth and soul of his musical Rolodex. He and Cheryl Bentley have an intimate, fingersnapping deep freeze session on "Cool" and his band includes some of L.A.'s best: producer Barbara Brighton, keyboardist Jamieson Trotter, and guitarist Anthony Wilson (both of whose arrangements make "cool" and "swinging" serious understatements), and saxman Bob Sheppard, who always lends just the right dose of emotional support. Seriously cool, sometimes downright sizzling, and frequently brilliant, Till I Get It Right does."

### **Mark Murphy**

"Winkler lays it out so pretty, so smooth...witty and straight no matter what! Buy this record, write Mark a letter of thanks, pour another drink... and play it again and again."

**Don Heckman, LA Times**

"Winkler's 'In a Lonely Place' is a reminder that classic, American songbook type tunes are still being written."

**Christopher Loudon, Jazz Times**

"There isn't anything fake about Mark Winkler. He's the real deal, and cool. Dave Frishberg cool, swimming pool cool, Sunset Strip cool."

**Myrna Daniels, L.A. Jazz Scene**

"His original tunes already sound like standards...Winkler is destined to become an important American composer as more people understand what a canny writer he is."

**Bob Dorough**

"Wink gets it right! I mean, from the opening, title song, you know he's on. But don't give up - there is a gamut to be run. I'd play the whole CD if I were you. With a little help from his friends, Mark comes up with twelve good ones. Great singing, too."