

SAN FRANCISCO BAY GUARDIAN

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Lee Hildebrand, Arts Reviewer

JAYWALKIN'

Irving Berlin may have written "Blue Skies" in Manhattan, but Bing Crosby gave it a sunny California ambience when he performed it in the 1946 movie musical of the same title. Oakland vocalist Jennifer Lee brings similar light to the tune on her debut CD, *J-Walkin'*, recorded in San Diego with guitarist-producer Peter Sprague, bassist Bob Magnusson, and other world-class players from that area. Lee has an inviting alto tone, with little trace of vibrato, and she phrases with consummate subtlety, a welcome throwback to a school of singers such as June Christy and Chris Connor who were once associated with Stan Kenton's brassy southern California big band. The arrangements here, however, are the opposite of Kenton's. The instrumentation is imaginatively minimal, with the rock-solid Magnusson supplying the primary harmonic underpinning much of the time and accordionist Rich Kuhn adding fibrous warmth when the occasion calls. Lee's enunciation is diamond-clear, whether rendering Cole Porter's English or Antonio Carlos Jobim's Portuguese, and on a couple tunes she also plays some fine piano accompaniment, which is showcased on the lovely original instrumental, "Cathy's Song," that closes this sublime dozen-song set. Diana Krall, move over!

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