

## SAN JOSE MERCURY NEWS

*September 19, 2003*

**Andrew Gilbert, Reviewer**

### **JAYWALKIN'**

Jennifer Lee celebrates the release of her debut solo album, *J-Walkin'*, at The Edge nightclub in Palo Alto on Sunday afternoon, with guitarist Jeff Buenz, bassist John Hettel, percussionist Tim Gutierrez and accordionist Rich Kuhns, a gifted musician who has also worked widely with Brazilian jazz singer Claudia Villela. The album was co-produced by Peter Sprague and mostly recorded in his Encinitas studio. A brilliant San Diego guitarist, Sprague has worked extensively with Chick Corea, Charles McPherson and Hubert Laws. He first heard Lee perform at a Southland jazz spot and was struck by her musicianship and ability to use her relatively small vocal range to maximum advantage. "There were so many elements that impressed me," Sprague says. "A lot of musicians don't like working with singers because oftentimes there's this diva approach without much musical knowledge. Jennifer doesn't have any of that going on. She's really gutsy. She's very happy to sing with one instrument barely playing. She loves space and the drama that it creates." Lee and Sprague's pianoless arrangements do leave her supple, clear voice plenty of room. From the album's opening tune, a hard-swinging, harmonically spare version of "Blue Skys", she is in complete control, a smart vocalist unafraid of emotion. While her renditions of Jerome Kern and Johnny Mercer's "I'm Old Fashioned" and Hoagy Carmichael's soaring "Baltimore Oriole" are particularly memorable, she is not wedded to standards. The album's most breathtaking track, inspired by Brazilian star Marisa Monte's recording, is Lee's gorgeous Portuguese version of the great samba composer Pixinguinha's "Rosa", which segues into Debussy's "Claire de Lune".

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