

EAST BAY EXPRESS

May 27, 2009

Lee Hildebrand, *Reviewer*

QUIET JOY

Bossa nova — the Brazilian blend that made significant inroads into American jazz and pop during the 1960s with its combination of the swing of jazz and the sway of samba — is back in vogue, as evidenced by recent Diana Krall and Eliane Elias recordings. On her second CD for San Diego guitarist Peter Sprague's SBE label, Oakland jazz vocalist Jennifer Lee applies her warmly inviting alto tones to a half-dozen bossa nova numbers, including the classics "O Barquinho" (Little Boat) and "O Pato" (The Duck). Lee uses Jon Hendricks' hip English lyrics on the latter and sings the self-penned title track wordlessly, but she renders the other four in lilting Portuguese. Her acoustic guitar chords add to the rhythm section on those selections. On many of the other songs she switches to piano or lays out instrumentally, letting Sprague, drummer Duncan Moore, and alternating bassists Buca Nacak and Bob Magnusson drive such swingers as "I Head Music," "Pennies from Heaven," and the original "You Knew," which references Peet's on Piedmont Avenue.

The Belgrade-born Nacak shows himself to be a rather original stylist, particularly when he scats along with several of his pizzicato bass solos, sort of like Slam Stewart without the bow. Peter Sprague plays some commanding guitar solos, both electric and acoustic, and his brother Tripp Sprague alternates between tenor saxophone and chromatic harmonica. His lyrical harmonica lines, which bring to mind both Stevie Wonder and Toots Thielemans, give additional gentleness to Lee's exquisitely tender reading of the Frank Churchill/Ned Washington lullaby "Baby Mine." (SBE Records)

By Lee Hildebrand