

and staunch ally, donating countless hours to gay causes through the years. For that reason, one hates to find fault with this album. But unless you're a devoted fan who needs to own every piece in her *oeuvre*, you might stick to the first album instead.

By Myself: The Songs of Judy Garland

Linda Eder • Angel Records

Judy Garland tragically died at the age of 47. For close to 45 of those years, she worked professionally as a singer. Yet, by the end of her life, her voice was a mere shadow of its glory (a pattern being repeated by daughter Liza Minnelli). Now, Linda Eder resurrects

the spirit and sound of Garland on her new album, *By Myself*.

Growing up in Minnesota, Eder learned to sing by listening to Garland, Barbra Streisand and opera diva Eileen Farrell (who sang well into her 70s, reinventing herself after a long opera career as a pop/jazz singer). And it shows, for echoes of each appear throughout Eder's lovely sound and expressive stylings.

Born just a few miles from Garland's hometown, Eder got her big break in 1988. After years in New York nightclubs, she appeared on *Star Search*, reigning for a record 13 weeks. That led to a leading role in the 1990 Broadway musical *Jekyll & Hyde*.

Her ninth album is a compilation of Garland songs, including "I'd Like to Hate Myself in the Morning," which Garland performed only once (on *The Merv Griffin Show*) and never recorded, though she certainly lived the philosophy.

The problem of making an album with the most popular of Garland's songs is that you invite comparisons with one of the greatest talents of the 20th century. Therefore, Eder has set a high bar for herself and, mostly, clears it, particularly with her rendition of "By Myself," which demonstrates an astonishing power as she sustains the final note a full eight bars.

With a strong instrument and wide range, she captures the strength and expressiveness of Garland's voice in a way that evokes the icon without necessarily parroting her (although a few moments are surprisingly close to mimicry). Perhaps the best moment is the verse from Garland's signature "Over the Rainbow" in

which Eder uses her own inflections and phrasing to make the quiet standard completely her own.

Unfortunately, the other ballads (including "The Boy Next Door") don't fare as well. Eder's instrument just doesn't have the vulnerability that Garland's did, and the comparisons are impossible to avoid. Better are the upbeat numbers, such as "Almost Like Being in Love" and "You Made Me Love You," where she expresses her joy and enthusiasm for life without the encumbrance of memories.

Bette Midler Sings the Peggy Lee Songbook

Bette Midler • Sony

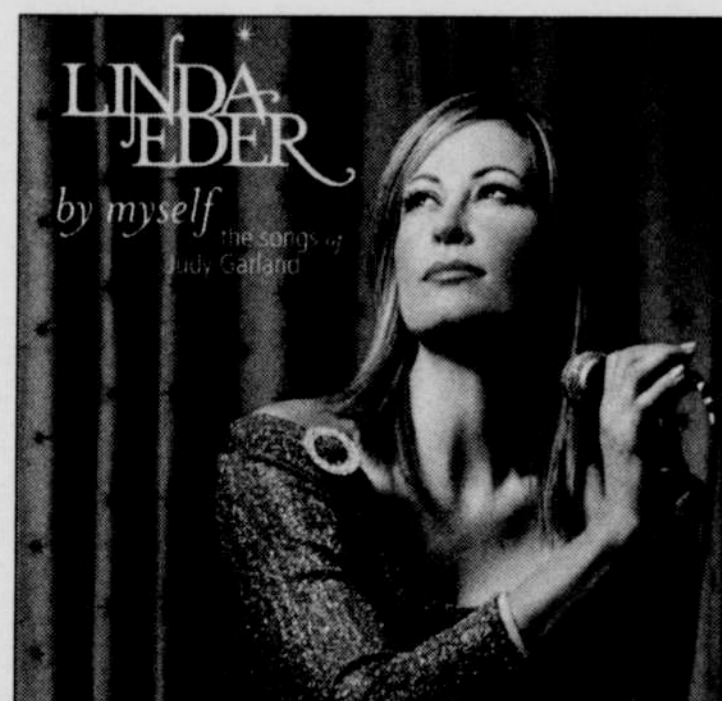
At first glance, the fiery Miss M wouldn't seem a natural to reinterpret the songs of a performer as cool and aloof as Peggy Lee. But, as on her *Rosemary Clooney Songbook*, the diva makes these 10 songs totally her own. Her version of the classic "Fever" may not be as original as Madonna's, and her take on "Big Spender" is surprisingly anemic, but she more than makes up for them with unabashedly dramatic takes on classics she seems born to sing, like the feminist anthem "I'm a Woman" and the four-act "Is That All There Is?," which recalls Midler's version of "Surabaya Johnny" from the early 1970s.

Midler just turned 60, but you'd never know it, partly because her signature sound has always been a little rough around the edges. And this disc, along with the Clooney songbook, brings her recording career

full circle. Both were the brainchild of Barry Manilow, who began as Midler's accompanist and arranger back at the Continental Baths in New York City.

Manilow's arrangements are a wonder. His versions of toe-tappers like "Alright, Okay, You Win" and "He's a Tramp" recall the lush but snappy sound Nelson Riddle created for Frank Sinatra's best recordings. Manilow also joins Midler for an ebullient duet, "I Love Being Here With You." The joy in their voices is palpable; you can practically hear them smiling together. As both artists head into their golden years, one can only hope these gay icons continue to make beautiful music together. **10**

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