

Cheryl Bentley The Gershwin Songbook

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By [Christopher Loudon](#)

Tempting as it is to number Cheryl Bentley's *The Gershwin Songbook* among the most satisfying vocal albums of 2010, such praise is unfairly limiting. Instead it must be lauded as one of the year's most accomplished albums, period.



True, it is Bentley's name above the title. And her soft-swinging interpretations of Gershwin classics are so unilaterally pert and fresh that they approach the sublimity of Ella's, Sarah's, Sinatra's, even Astaire's. But credit for the album's excellence must be shared among all the participants. First are Bentley's seven bandmates: pianists Corey Allen and Ted Howe, bassist Kevin Axt, guitarist Larry Koonse, flutist Peter Gordon, clarinetist Ken Peplowski and Bentley's longtime drummer/percussionist and occasional vocal partner, Dave Tull. Each is in top form; together they're tighter than a Lady Gaga bodysuit.

Then there's Bentley's close pal and frequent nightclub sidekick Mark Winkler, who meanders in for a round of playful phraseological sparring on "Let's Call the Whole Thing Off." The loudest hurrahs, however, are due Allen in his wider role as producer: He is the ringmaster who makes the magic gel. And, across a 14-track playlist that extends from a shimmering "Isn't It a Pity" (cleverly re-imagined in waltz time) to a sparkling "Lady Be Good," he also proves himself an arbiter of intelligently rendered distinctiveness.