

Mark Murphy

Love Is What Stays

Verve 06025 1714489 Release date: January 26, 2007



1. **STOLEN MOMENTS** (Oliver Nelson/Mark Murphy)
2. **ANGEL EYES** (Matt Dennis/Earl Brent)
3. **MY FOOLISH HEART** (Victor Young/Ned Washington)
4. **SO DOGGONE LONESOME** (Johnny Cash)
5. **WHAT IF** (Coldplay)
6. **THE INTERVIEW** (Mark Murphy)
7. **ONCE UPON A SUMMERTIME** (Michel Legrand/Eddie Barclay/Eddy Marnay/Johnny Mercer)
8. **STOLEN MOMENTS** (1st reprise) (Oliver Nelson/Mark Murphy)
9. **LOVE IS WHAT STAYS** (Till Brönner/Mark Murphy)
10. **STOLEN MOMENTS** (2nd reprise) (Oliver Nelson/Mark Murphy)
11. **TOO LATE NOW** (Burton Lane/Alan Jay Lerner)
12. **BLUE CELL PHONE** (Mark Murphy)
13. **DID I EVER REALLY LIVE** (Albert Hague/Allan Sherman)

Musicians:

Mark Murphy - vocals
Till Brönner – trumpet & Flugelhorn
Peter Weniger – tenor & soprano sax
Grégoire Peters – tenor sax, flutes & bass clarinet
Frank Chastenier – piano
Kai Brückner, Johan Leijonhufvud, Karl Schloz – guitar
Christian von Kaphengst – bass
Sebastian Merk – drums
Arne Schumann – accordion

Guests:

Lee Konitz – alto sax
Don Grusin – Fender rhodes
Chuck Loeb – guitars

Deutsches Symphonie Orchester Berlin, arranged and conducted by Nan Schwartz

The passage of time is on Mark Murphy's mind a lot these days, as this album suggests. "At my age," he says, "you become boggled by how time affects your future, your past, and the present. It's tickin' away, and you can't do nothin' about it."

But time has been good to his voice: a rich, virile, attractively craggy bass-baritone, etched with the wisdom of a fifty-year journey. It's a sound that could have crept from the shadows of some smoky dive in a Robert Mitchum film noir. "Just listen to Mark Murphy, and the odds are in favor of your being provoked to extremes," declared the liner notes of his first LP, made for Decca in 1956. Murphy, the writer added, "is one of the great singers of our times."

All that could just as well be said today. The evidence is on this new album, recorded fifty years after Mark's Decca debut. *Love Is What Stays* may be the truest portrait ever of this quirky, artistically fearless, emotionally naked jazz singer. At an age when most vocalists have either called it quits or are coasting on the past, Mark is as restless as he was in the '50s, when his career launched him on a Kerouacian road trip without end. In 2006 he went to Berlin, where he made this CD. On it, Mark dips into the songs of Johnny Cash, Oliver Nelson, Alan Jay Lerner, and Coldplay; recites some of his spacey, free-form poetry; unveils the latest of his dreamlike lyrics; and scats as freely as John Coltrane played.

Joining Mark is the same team that helped make his prior album, *Once to Every Heart*, his biggest success



in years. That was the project that united him with Till Brönner, Germany's most popular and adventurous trumpeter. Born in 1971, Till has already earned a place among the best jazz minimalists. Beneath his ice-blue tone and cool swagger is a depth of feeling that "blew me away," says Mark; it sets Till far above most of today's bloodless, scholarly jazz robots. As this album's producer and bandleader, he gathered a group of young musicians that Mark adores. "I get their energy," he says. "It energizes me."

Like *Once to Every Heart*, this album features the haunting string charts of Nan Schwartz, the Emmy- and Grammy-nominated arranger. A pretty blonde from Southern California, Schwartz has arranged for Ray Charles, the Boston Pops, and Eddie Daniels, and has scored several top American TV shows, including *In the Heat of the Night* and *Cagney & Lacey*. Nan is a master of less-is-more, and a storyteller without words.

It was Till's idea to use "Stolen Moments", Mark's longtime signature song, as a recurring theme for this album. Mark wrote the words, which are set to a classic 1961 instrumental by Oliver Nelson. Says Till: "Stolen Moments seemed to be a nice vehicle to show that Mark is drawing on a gigantic era that he, among others, has created, and that he will leave us as a legacy someday."

Mark recorded a torchy version of "Angel Eyes" on *Rah!*, his acclaimed 1961 album, whose all-star band included Bill Evans. "Everyone was singing it then, it was very hip," says Mark. "And it still is. And one reason it is still hip is that you can keep redoing it in different ways." This cooler, tougher new version features a verse written in 1975 for June Christy. Till and his bandmates - notably pianist Frank Chastenier and guitarist Johan Leijonhufvud - sound appropriately low-down and funky.

Tension is in Mark's voice as he sings "My Foolish Heart", a troubled love song introduced in a 1949 Susan Hayward film of the same name. That same year, alto saxophonist Lee Konitz joined Miles Davis on the recordings that later became famous as *Birth of the Cool*. Fifty-seven years later, Konitz is here on "My Foolish Heart", sounding as cool and swinging as ever. Nan Schwartz's surging strings evoke a boat on a stormy sea.

One of the songs that Till found for Mark is "What If", a 2006 single by Coldplay, the British alternative rock group. "Looking for the same old Broadway repertoire, just because that's what jazzers do, didn't seem like the right approach to me," explains Till. "I always thought Mark could make it in any musical genre. I like Coldplay a lot, and I am glad something real can still be successful these days. I knew Mark would kill on this song, and he gave me his trust. At his age!"

Says Mark: "When I first heard their record I thought, how am I going to sing this? But Till kept after me. And with Nan Schwartz's gorgeous chart behind it, I'm gonna enjoy singing it."

"The Interview" is half poetry, half scat, with Christian von Kaphengst's bass tiptoeing through like a black cat in the night. "I just woke up one morning with half of that poem in my head, and I wrote it down quickly," Mark says. "See, I'm a frustrated actor, so I like reading words. Getting to know the inside and outside of what they really mean." At one of the sessions, Mark pulled the poem out of his pocket. "He didn't tell us exactly what was gonna happen," says Till. "He just asked for our attention and a groove starting on the word 'time.' Then he read us the words as the tape was rolling. He was marvelous on this, and it was great fun to put brass, soloists, and orchestra on top of this. I wanted it to sound like he was giving an interview for a TV team while taking a walk in the forest, with a piano player heard in the background from the teahouse nearby." What Nan Schwartz added to it, says Mark, is "frightening. One thing I love is that she's created a rather interesting harmonic usage of dynamics; the chart is absolutely stunning. I defy you to get another orchestra who could play what she wrote!"

"So Doggone Lonesome" brought Johnny Cash one of his first hits in 1955. "It's a pretty fast song in his version," says Till. "It almost sounds like Johnny didn't want to show too much of his feelings, so he chose a rather fast tempo to hide a pretty sad story." Mark decided to "just treat it like a blues lyric, which it really sort of is." He and Till sound like two old codgers at the end of the line, with no one left but each other.

"Love Is What Stays" is based on Till's instrumental "What Stays", included in his 1998 album "Love". "I gotta tell you, I think it's one of the sexiest melodies ever written," says Mark, who wrote the comforting lyric. "Blue Cell Phone" is another of their collaborations. Film noir, a passion of Mark's, inspired the mysterious words.



"Once Upon a Summertime" began life in the '50s as "La valse des lilas" (The Waltz of the Lilacs), a Michel Legrand chanson. Then Johnny Mercer added English words, which Blossom Dearie introduced. Finally this heartrending look at lost love and youth has found its way into Mark's hands. Against a hazy setting of strings, Mark sings of memories so sweet they're almost too painful to revisit.

Brokeback Mountain is a film that haunted Mark; he watched it over and over. It was in his thoughts while he sang "Too Late Now." As introduced by Jane Powell in Royal Wedding, the song expressed the joy of finding your heart's desire. For Mark, it's about how you feel when you've lost that love forever. He conceived it as a statement from Ennis del Mar to Jack Twist, Brokeback's cowboy lovers. "But of course Jack was gone, so it was too late now, you know?"

"Did I Ever Really Live?" comes from a Broadway revue, The Fig Leaves Are Falling, that ran less than a week in January 1969. This song might have died too if it hadn't been rescued by Joe Williams and Carmen McRae, both of whom were old enough to ask themselves the tough questions in the lyric. "It's a little scary, parts of that," says Mark, but he plunged into it anyway, brave as ever.

What would he like the people who hear this album to take away with them? "Really, that I sing my life," he says. "I'm not just up there fooling around; the words and notes I sing are, I hope, parts of my life that I'm sharing with the audience. I think you've got to have that attitude, or it is simply not sincere."

James Gavin, New York City, 2006

[James Gavin, the author of Deep in a Dream: The Long Night of Chet Baker, is writing a biography of Lena Horne.]