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Thrash, Introspection and a Touch of the Cantor



Jacob Garchik

singer Judith Berkson, whose latest is "Oylam."

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Judith Berkson

Judith Berkson is an art-song vocalist in her early 30s who's got some jazz training; she likes the Fender Rhodes at least as much as the piano, and she's also a cantor. That's a lot, and all of it fits comfortably into "Oylam," her first album for ECM: standards and [Schubert](#) and liturgical music, swing and chilly silences, a beautiful Satie-like piece in two different versions, to open and close the record. I can't get enough of it. Proof of an artist with iron will: this album, on a venerable label with wide distribution, sounds pretty similar to her first one, released on the tiny Brooklyn label Peacock Recordings. Ms. Berkson has an imperious talent, but she's a calm, curious performer, devising brave ways to accompany herself.