

The bottom line is that fifteen-year-old girls aren't supposed to play like this. You're not supposed to listen to an EP and hear such soulful playing, such swinging, such clear melodic ideas that are *improvised* coming from the instruments of children. Oh yes, she's still a child, although you wouldn't know this from her playing. You'd know it if you had to drive her to her friends' houses because she isn't old enough to drive, or have a job, forget about voting or drinking. She still has homework to do. That is, it's still called homework, not even the collegiate notion of 'having to study.' Amy, have you done your homework?—that's where she is in life.

In a blindfold test, you might think this is an old recording of Milt Jackson, maybe with Paul Chambers or Percy Heath, the other two players, local guys. It would be an album, vinyl, maybe fifty years old, a small label. And you might guess the age of this new vibes player to be in *his* forties. That's what the sophisticated jazz listener might come up with in a blindfold test. Fifteen year old girl, accompanied by her first teachers and a sub that occasionally shows up at her high school—not the jazz sophisticate's first guess.

And even though she loves and continually downloads all the music her friends do, she is drawn to art that is older, movies in black and white, jazz played when the recording equipment was pretty bad and was done by guys sticking a mike in the middle of a room, turning on the reel to reel, and letting the musicians play, the kind of recordings where the dark of night was part of the rhythm section. She not only knows about Milt Jackson—she's a bigger fan of Lem Winchester. Perhaps, then, this is the most appropriate way for her to join the club of jazz recording artists, with a short recording done in the style of the days when jazz was king—or queen. We could say this was an artistic statement, but she's really not old enough to make such a statement, just old enough to say what she likes, what she doesn't. She can't say that she just graduated college, and was considered an up and coming player by her professors or the jazz critics of New York. She *can* say, and in this recording she does say, that she knows the history of her craft, she knows who came before her, she knows where she fits in—and all of this gives her playing depth, a maturity beyond her years, perhaps the music of an old soul in the body of a teenager.

The first song, *Joe Moon*, is an original composition of guitarist Howard Stein, with a popping head and an even more popping solo as Amy builds the intensity by holding turnaround phrases into the succeeding choruses. And yet, this is not just a technique. This is because it grew from her own feelings, her own sense of building excitement about the tune as it evolved—on this first take.

The next song, perhaps one of the most beautiful jazz songs written, Cleo Henry's *Boplicity*, is played with elegance by Amy and bassist David Tyberg, who for all listeners who believe in reincarnation, might be Paul Chambers. But during this lifetime Chambers is living in

considerably different wrapping paper. The sound, though, is unmistakable. This tune was done in two takes.

Amy doesn't really know how to react when she hears Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers playing the Charlie Parker composition *Confirmation*, because Clifford Brown and Lou Donaldson flub around on the second four bars of the bridge, and Amy plays the notes without the mistakes. Just a little feeling of cognitive dissonance on her part. She spreads the feeling around to us as we hear her swing through this as if she herself always played with Parker. Two takes here.

Finally, how can she not pay tribute to the great Milt Jackson, playing Bag's Groove, a tune synonymous with Jackson? If Jackson would ever be in the same room as Amy, and if he wore a ratty old leather hat—this tune would call for a Phil Woods/Grace Kelly moment. I know she would bow to him, and I suspect he would tip his mallets toward her. Another two takes

The rest of the rhythm section, drummer Peggy Benkeser and guitarist Howard Stein, combine with David Tyberg to form an old style unit, reminiscent of Jimmy Forrest's groups, the Tommy Potter, Clarence Johnston, Calvin Newborn, Hugh Lawson sections—the melding of sounds into one soft and swinging unit—giving the soloist, Jimmy Forrest in those cases, Amy Levin in the present case, the room to stretch out with both passion and beauty. That's what the softness does, it allows for beauty to develop in the song.

I find myself hearing, from my natural iPod, the one I was born with, the one I had before there were iPods, I find myself hearing passages from this recording just walking down the street, or driving to the grocery store in a silent car—feeling the swing, the lyricism, and yes, the spontaneity that makes Jazz music the most beautiful music in the world.