

The New York Times

For Longtime Jazz Singer, Latest Success Is Sweet

By TAMMY LA GORCE
Published: April 6, 2008
TEANECK

In the Region: Long Island, Westchester, Connecticut and New Jersey

AMY LONDON knows how to raise children with impeccable taste in music.

“This is what you do,” the jazz singer and mother of two said, looking down at her hands before continuing. “You start them as babies on Rodgers and Hammerstein. Then you go through a steady diet of Ella Fitzgerald and Lambert, Hendricks and Ross. That’s what we did, and my kids have never liked cheesy pop music.”

Ms. London also has the dramatic flair one might expect of a jazz artist.

For instance, when the topic turned to her age, there was a stage-worthy pause: “I’m 50,” she said from her dining room table here. “I was thinking, ‘Should I take a few years off?’ But no, 50.”

In a sense, 50 has been a rebirth for the artist, whose first CD as the leader of a quintet, “When I Look in Your Eyes” (Motema), was released in December, and who was scheduled to perform at Teaneck’s Cedar Lane Cinemas on April 5 as part of a new concert series there. (Ms. London will also play April 16 at St. Peter’s Church in Manhattan and May 11 at “Brooklyn Sings, Brooklyn Swings” at the Brooklyn Public Library.)

“I never really went away — I got my first job performing in New York before I even got an apartment. I’ve always worked,” said Ms. London, who arrived in Manhattan from her native Cincinnati in 1980. She sang in the Tony Award winning musical “City of Angels” from 1989 to 1992 before moving to Teaneck in 1998 with her husband, the jazz guitarist Roni Ben-Hur, and their daughters Sofia, now 12, and Anna, now 9.

“When you’re a part of the jazz scene, the whole ‘making it’ thing — are you making it or not — is a myth. It’s more about making music and working, just being in it. But there is no doubt that I’m having an incredible ride right now,” said Ms. London, who helped start the vocal department at the New School in Manhattan in 1992 and continues to teach there, one of five adjunct jazz-singing professors.

Since 2005, when she recorded “When I Look in Your Eyes,” a swinging but sophisticated CD with echoes of her childhood influences Laura Nyro and Ella Fitzgerald, at Bennett Studios in Englewood, “everything has been snowballing,” she said. “This is my first big-deal record, and the players on it are amazing.”

They include a list of luminaries Ms. London played with through her decades of performing at notable Manhattan spots like the Blue Note and the Rainbow Room. In addition to the bassist Rufus Reid, the drummer Leroy Williams, the pianist Lee Musiker and Mr. Ben-Hur, the late pianist John Hicks appears in one of his last studio projects.

The album is only the first in a string that Motema will release: “Bridges,” Ms. London’s second CD, comes out later this year.

“It’s a compilation of my early recordings from 1984, 1987 and 1991,” she said of “Bridges.” “What happened was, I almost signed to a major label back then. But it didn’t work out, so I literally put the recordings — they were on two-inch master reels — on a shelf in my closet. For years.”

Converting the reels to CD involved both high- and low-tech wizardry: baking in a home oven was involved. But the results, Ms. London said, are stunning.

“I sound younger. Embryonic, practically. But it still sounds like me. And there are some big names on those songs” — the pianist Fred Hirsch produced some tracks and plays on the album, Ms. London said.

If looking back affords fond memories, the here and now — here being Teaneck — reinforces them.

“Teaneck has traditionally been a residential area for jazz musicians,” Ms. London said. “And there have been so many here — Sam Jones, Rufus Reid, Lisle Atkinson, Nat Adderley.”

April is national Jazz Appreciation Month, and the Teaneck Public Library is presenting a photographic exhibition of jazz musicians who live or have lived in Teaneck, including Ms. London and Mr. Ben-Hur. If time treats her the way she would like — if 60 is as good a year as 50 — Ms. London’s may one day be among the names of the local celebrities she rattled off: “You asked me if I am at the top of my game,” she wrote in an e-mail message after the interview. “Absolutely yes, but I aim to be even at a higher place in 10 years, and 10 years after that.”





AMY LONDON

When I Look In Your Eyes (Motema)

January/February 2008 issue

Even the most ardent fan of the pop-jazz vocal idiom would be hard-pressed to identify Milt Weiner. But, as coach and teacher, Weiner helped shape two of the finest female singers to ever emerge from Ohio, Doris Day and Rosemary Clooney (and, yes, before you sharpen your pencils, I know Clooney hailed from Kentucky, but she did spend several of her formative years north of the Ohio River). Later, Weiner worked with another Ohioan, sculpting a voice of near-equal appeal but, subsequently, only a fraction of the eminence. That voice belongs to Amy London, and it's been around a good while, as a centerpiece of various Broadway musicals, as one-third of the popular Manhattan vocal trio Jazz Babies, on tour with the likes of George Benson, Charles Aznavour and Dr. Lonnie Smith and on recordings by Barry Harris, Fred Hersch and the New York Voices.

Now, at last, London is stepping out in front, with her first album as leader. And what a cornucopia of delights it is, as she wraps her sterling pipes around a dozen wide-ranging tracks. In honor of one her earliest musical heroes, Laura Nyro, she delivers a caressingly wistful "Lazy Susan." To salute her home state, she lends precisely the right mix of longing and loneliness to Leonard Bernstein's "Ohio," then reverses her homesickness by twining it with a breezy "Anyplace I Hang My Hat Is Home." She's all wide-eyed ebullience on the Johnny Mathis signature tune "Wonderful, Wonderful," cool as autumn twilight on Antonio Carlos Jobim's mournful "Passarim," then steamy as a Caribbean heat wave on an Annie Ross-worthy "Swingin' the Blues." In short, as many a sage New Yorker already knows, hers is an immense talent deserving of national attention.

-Christopher Loudon

AMY LONDON



WHEN I LOOK IN YOUR EYES

A MOTÉMA MUSIC RELEASE

The NYC Buzz

"It's a total delight, and her choice of songs is wonderful. I would recommend it to anybody, it's really great!"

– **Annie Ross** (Vocalese Pioneer - Lambert, Hendricks & Ross)

"Amy's voice is lush, sensitive and expressive. Listening to her CD was a most enjoyable hour!"

– **Yaron Gershovsky** (Musical Director - Manhattan Transfer)

"Amy London is a world-class singer --- possessing a beautiful and expressive vocal instrument and always musical!"

– **Fred Hersch** (Internationally Renowned Pianist)

"I really enjoyed Amy London's CD, her voice has such a mature rich sound, and her vocal control is tremendous. From the opening track, through 'The Best Is Yet To Come,' the stuff is swingin'! Kudos to the arrangers as well – the accompaniment really supports Amy very nicely. I hope her work on this CD gets the recognition it deserves!"

– **Darmon Meader** (Leader, New York Voices)

"Amy London is a warm, swinging and skilled singer deserving wider recognition!"

– **Lee Musiker** (Musical Director - Tony Bennett)

"What makes Amy London a unique musician and vocalist is the fact the she is a musician that happens to be a vocalist. This is still, unfortunately, a rare entity. If it isn't for musical reason, Amy refuses to comply. Amy is a seasoned musician with talents as a composer, and educator that is world class. She sings beautifully whether rendering songs from the theater, the American Song Book, Jazz standards, or her own creations that have the core of the BeBop tradition. Amy's voice is rich and full of nuances and, most importantly, control. With this new recording she steps up to the plate and hits a homerun with all of her skills!"

– **Rufus Reid** (Legendary Bassist, Author & Jazz Educator)

"Amy London is the ultimate artist. From the moment you hear her voice you will know. Her choice of songs and musicians impressed me. What amazed me the most was how she adapts to any situation. She can swing you with the big band, and sauté you with a ballad. In my opinion Amy London is the real deal!!!!"

– **Steven Kroon** (Internationally Renowned Percussionist)

"Amy London, where have you been hiding? Why oh why did you make us wait so long for your artistry? And such a lovely choice of songs, underdone but new and imaginative ... what I liked the best was her showing us what JOY is... she sounds so happy and at home with all the players. So few projects show this joy... Amy, thanks so much for the courage, don't leave us so long without another CD! You make a weary old guy feel young again!"

– **Mark Murphy** (Grammy Award Winning Vocalist)

