

Voice of an emerging star

Special talents are easy to identify, and Laurel K. Adams clearly has that flair. She's gifted with a wonderful, distinctive voice, and has a style and charisma that is already very noticeable and will only get better with age. Adams already has a polish and confidence that would be impressive at any age but is even more so for an 18-year-old. She has a professional dream that's somewhat unique in today's marketplace. Adams wants to be a jazz singer, striving to excel in a field where the criticism can be brutal, and newcomers are immediately subjected to comparisons that are often unfair and unjust. Still, she isn't afraid or concerned about the challenge.

Laurel K. Adams has the potential to do what Norah Jones has done, broaden the horizons of audiences in regard to what constitutes a jazz vocalist. Neither Adams or Jones is a scatter like Ella Fitzgerald, nor do they possess the poignant tones of a Billie Holiday, or the range of a Sarah Vaughan or Carmen McRae. But Adams, like Jones, continually shows that a softer, sensual delivery can not only work in the improvisational world, but be equally compelling and convincing. Hopefully, Adams will eventually enjoy the same success as Jones in winning over jazz critics while doing songs that reveal the influence of country, folk and pop.

In fact Adams began working in country, and has also dabbled in folk. Ultimately though, jazz has emerged as the idiom best suited to display her full range of talents. These include an energetic personality and natural charm, the ability to handle with ease any type of song from Broadway show tunes to a Carol King pop hit, and a timing and delivery that are precise and delightful. Adams is also a solid musician and songwriter, who's played piano & guitar for years.

Adams is currently mentoring under the watchful eye of veteran singer/songwriter JP Olson, who has plenty of good things to say about her skills. "I don't really take on a lot of new students or projects at this point, but I was blown away by Laurel's talent," Olson said in a recent interview. "The biggest problem was finding exactly where she fit in musically, what genre really worked for her. She sang everything that we gave her with a lot of style, but the songs weren't really enabling her to really show a personality and individuality. Then I thought about jazz, and that really seemed to work best. She's really taken to it and is very serious about wanting that to be her niche.."

Adams has listened closely to some of the greatest jazz singers, and also recently had a chance to hear topflight jazz and blues performers during a visit to Nashville and Memphis. Accompanied by Olson, she got to see Nashville great Kevin Whalum and Memphis legend Joyce Cobb, while also visiting Music City's Nashville Jazz Workshop and its Jazz Cave, as well as the famed Beale Street. She also attended a meeting of music writers and publicists in Nashville at Edley's Barbecue, and there she talked about why she felt jazz would be the best fit for her musically.

"I think it really provides me the best foundation," Adams said. "I can express feelings and say things within the jazz framework as a songwriter. I've found it's the best genre to stretch out your voice. I'm still getting some things down in regard to technique, but it's really become my favorite music. I also like singer/songwriters like Carol King, and I grew up listening to rock and hip-hop. But all of

those things can fit into a jazz background, and that's what I'm doing now."

A first full-length LP from Laurel K. Adams will be coming either late this year or early in 2023. But whatever she does, it will be something fresh and unique. She won't try to be another Sarah Vaughan or Ella Fitzgerald. Instead, she'll offer fans her own brand of inventive, swinging music, 21st century jazz with a traditional sensibility.