



PwV

by Philip van Vleck

LIGHT SHINES ON CHAPEL HILL'S ALLYSON LIGHT

One of the more compelling singer/songwriters in the Triangle is also one of the youngest. Nineteen-year-old Allyson Light, presently a sophomore at Sarah Lawrence College in New York, is a Chapel Hill native who's been penning her own tunes since age 14. Now five years removed from those early songs, Light's musical gifts are blossoming prodigiously.

Light's most recent album, *Looking Glass Conversations*, released last year, reveals an artist who's coming into her own as a composer and performer. The clarity and strength of her voice are excellent, and her musicianship is polished.

Fans of Tori Amos, Kate Bush or Jane Siberry may well find Light to be an artist they'll enjoy.

Light was raised in the shadow of UNC-Chapel Hill, where both her parents were faculty members. "My parents are both scientists, but my dad's

parents were both musicians," Light said. "My grandmother was actually my first music teacher. She did her graduate work at Juilliard and was a piano and voice teacher. She lived in South Carolina, so we didn't see her terribly often. And there was always music in our house anyway."

Light's first songwriting experience came during a stay in the Rocky Mountains. "When I was 14 we lived in Utah for a year," she recalled. "My parents were on sabbatical, and we went to stay outside Park City. We lived a long way from anybody, I was new in town, and I was 14. I was a

good and solid 14. I didn't know anyone I could go and spend time with, so I sat in the house and played the piano all the time. That was also the year I took off from classical piano lessons. I still took voice, however. I got this book of Tori Amos sheet music, and I played every song in that book every night. That's when I started writing songs. I mean, that's all I was doing with my time—playing the piano—so the songwriting came from it.

"I went to my dad after I wrote my first song and said, 'Hey, I wrote a song,'" she continued. "And my dad said, 'Really? Well, I guess we'll get some equipment and record them.' So we got a little mini-mixing board and some microphones and some software for the computer and just set it up that way in the house. We recorded *Water*, my first CD, that way."

Asked how her parents had reacted to her musical ambitions since their time in Utah, Light replied, "My parents have been incredibly supportive of my music. They're the reason I was able to go on tour this summer. All the time I was in high school they went to all my shows, helped me load on my equipment and helped me with the sound. Then they sat there and were the impetus for applause after every song. I learned this past summer that that's a very useful thing to have.

"This summer I played in 19 different Border's Book Stores, where people are thinking a lot more about the magazine they're going to buy than the music in the

background. Having just one person there to start the applause really changes the mood of a show. I really think people enjoy a show more when they think others are enjoying it."

Light remains something of an unknown quantity as a stylist. A challenge all artists face is finding their distinctive niche, and Light is presently on the quest.

"I think it's funny the way I've cycled through styles," she said. "I think I'm becoming more mainstream in my style now, but I don't think it's my attempt to grab an

audience. It's more that this is the kind of music I'm feeling now—more grounded chords, more steady motion, more basic chord progressions. I just have to go with what I'm doing at the time and not try to judge it."

Light cited some of her musical influences, noting, "Tori Amos, of course, and Joni Mitchell, whom I grew up on and sang along with. Judy Collins, too. The first CD I ever went out and bought was *Surfacing*, by Sarah McLachlan. She's been a big influence.

"Nowadays I feel a lot of inspiration from other independent musicians whom I've played with," she added. "They've been incredible role models, showing me that this can be done. Vienna Teng is one such person. My piano teacher, Lisa Ray, is another."

Light has chosen her role models wisely, and it shows in the surprisingly sophisti-



COURTESY ALLYSSON LIGHT



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cated level of her own songwriting. Asked how she regards her early songs now, she allowed that “They’re hard for me to listen to, as much for the recording as for the songs themselves. They make sense coming out of a 14-year-old’s mouth. That age is a miserable age, and it didn’t help that I played the piano, which I think is an instrument that’s inclined toward misery. The things that I wrote were kind of oblique poetry about the fact that I was unhappy. I would take images from around me and try to give them meanings that they didn’t necessarily have. With my more recent stuff

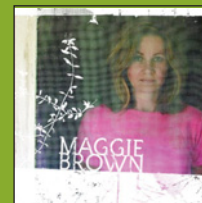
I’m trying to be more open and honest, and not hide behind the lyrics like I used to do. The writing’s been going a lot slower because of that, however.”

Light plans on sticking with her music for “the foreseeable future.” She admits to planning carefully, however. “I’m very much into making sure I have a fallback. Maybe sociology or public policy. If worse comes to worse, I could always go into advertising.”

For more on Alysson Light, or to buy her CDs, check out her Web site: www.alyssonlight.com. **MM**

QUICK FIX

Maggie Brown:
Maggie Brown
(Riverwide Music).
Singer/songwriter
Maggie Brown’s
twang-rich debut
album instantly



separates her from her less-inspiring peers. Her tune “Used Cars” is a satellite radio hit for good reason. Best get some of this.

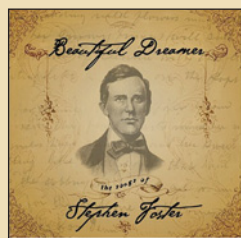
DISCOLOGY

Various Artists:

Beautiful Dreamer: The Songs of Stephen Foster

(American Roots Publishing)

This is an amazing album. Recording artists the like of Mavis Staples, Raul Malo, David Ball, John Prine, Suzy Bogguss, Ron Sexsmith, Alison Krauss, Yo Yo Ma, Alvin Youngblood Hart and BR5-49 were drawn together to record songs by the great 19th-century American songwriter Stephen Foster.



The result is a collection of 18 gorgeous tunes. Some, like “Beautiful Dreamer,” “Hard Times Come Again

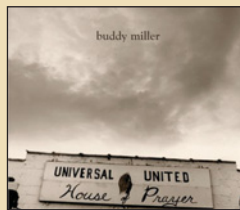
No More,” “Old Folks at Home,” “Camptown Races” and “Oh! Susanna” are well-known American classics. Other Foster tunes—“Holiday Schottisch,” “Gentle Annie” and “No One To Love”—are generally more obscure, but no less charming. Blessed by uniformly discerning performances and excellent production values, *Beautiful Dreamer* is a gem, and an ideal tribute to a brilliant, pioneering songwriter who should have been lionized in his own lifetime.

Buddy Miller:

Universal House of Prayer

(New West)

Nashville-based artist Buddy Miller has come to be well known through his leadership role in Emmylou Harris’ band. With the release of *Universal House of Prayer*, however, perhaps Miller will



finally be thoroughly recognized as the brilliant roots music artist that he is. Miller has

never tracked a solo project that was anything short of excellent, but this new CD is above and beyond anything he’s previously accomplished. *Universal House of Prayer* is surely destined to be the best Americana album of 2004. With the timely aid of vocalists Regina and Ann McCrary and the stellar songwriting contribution of Julie Miller, Buddy has crafted a masterwork. From the opening track—a cover of Mark Heard’s ominous “Worry Too Much”—to the gritty rock of “Don’t Wait” and his awesome duet with Emmylou on “Wide River to Cross,” Miller stands triumphant among Nashville’s major-label artists, like Gulliver amidst the Lilliputians. Fans of roots and Americana should already be out the door and on their way to the record store to buy this extraordinary album.

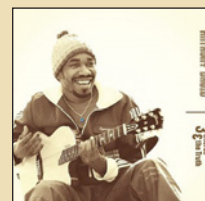
Anthony David:

3 Chords & the Truth

(Brash Music)

As the bulk of rap music continues its descent through the various levels of hell, well on its way to becoming the disco music of the early 21st century, let’s turn our attention to that rarest of all artists—the African-American singer/songwriter.

Anthony David, an Atlanta-based artist authored or co-wrote every track on this CD, and he’s a songwriter with some-



thing to say. He’s got the cool of Bill Withers and a flair for penning a catchy, intelligent tune. David keeps it simple here—a sign that he’s confident enough to push his voice and his lyrics up front and let the listener decide if he’s got some chops. Check out “Cold Turkey,” “50/50 Love” and “GA Peach” for a quick clue about the diverse influences at play in David’s music. One spin through *3 Chords & the Truth* will be sufficient to convince almost anyone that David’s musical talent is major league caliber. It doesn’t take a Cassandra to predict that Anthony David has a bright future in the music biz.