

Up Close and Personal: Laura Ainsworth

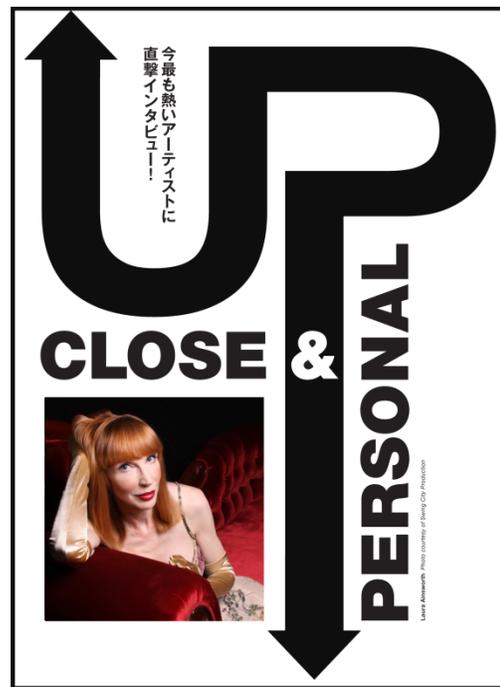
Interview by Hiroki Sugita

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The retro jazz singer's first three albums make their debut in Japan. "My style is... a blend of old and new elements that yields a fresh, vibrant, and personal sound."

Dallas, Texas based retro jazz singer Laura Ainsworth debuted in Japan last year with her compilation LP, *Top Shelf*. She grew up listening to big bands and female vocal jazz, and was influenced by her father, a saxophone/clarinet player who played with Ella Fitzgerald, Tony Bennett, and the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra. After working in commercial music production and performing as an actress, she transitioned into a career as a jazz singer, because she realized that recording forgotten and rare older songs keeps the memories of both the music and the artists who performed it alive.

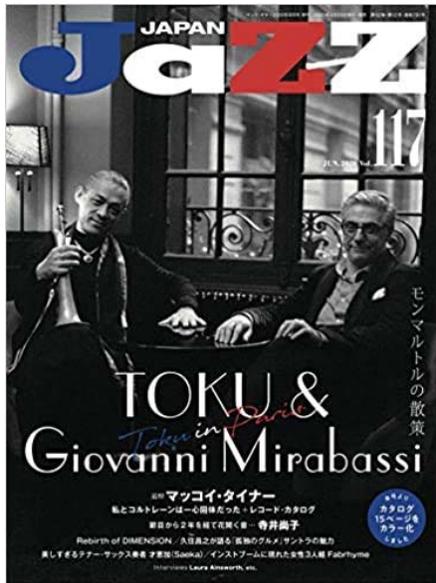
We hear her musical style fully matured on her debut album *Keep It to Yourself*, which was released in 2011.



“I grew up listening to jazz because of my musician father. But I only began recording after singing in many previous projects and also having many life experiences. I had time to think about what I wanted to be known for, and what would best reflect my voice and personality. I also wanted to make sure that my albums had the best production, musicians, song sequencing, and packaging. They have to compete not only with modern major label releases, but also with reissued albums by my inspirations.”

The album's track list contains mostly lesser known songs, with less than half being well-known songs such as “Love For Sale” and “Skylark”, so vocal jazz enthusiasts will find something to enjoy in it. The

results of her exploration include “While The Music Plays On”, which she found on a compilation CD of music by Doris Day from when she was with the Les Brown Orchestra, and “That’s The Kind Of Guy I Dream Of,” the B-side of a Betty Hutton 45 rpm single that incidentally was also recorded by The Nat King Cole Trio who utilized an approach very similar to hers (she found this out after recording her version). We can also imagine that she is conscious of creating new standards out of the contemporary songs “Keep It to Yourself” and “Fantastic Planet of Love,” both of which came out in the 1990s–2000s.



After Laura gained an excellent reputation for her debut album, she released her follow-up album, *Necessary Evil*. The album was inspired by 1940s "film noir" movies, and she assumed the contrasting characterizations of both a “femme fatale” and a “jilted lover”. Regarding the title song, she said, “When I first heard Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong’s song ‘Necessary Evil’, I knew it would make a great solo song for me. The song title is a powerful phrase, so I immediately saw it as the title for the album.” She also explained the reason why she featured a genuine big band sound, complete with a horn section, for the opening and ending tracks: “A big, bold opening and a big, bold ending are intended to work as ‘bookends’, inviting one to listen to the CD over and over.”

Laura took a cue from the way Ella Fitzgerald and Frank Sinatra would revitalize songs from the 1920s–1930s with a new sound in the 1950s. Talking about her 3rd album, *New Vintage*, she said: “My sound is not contemporary vocal jazz, and it’s not slavishly retro either. It’s a blend of old and new elements that yields a classic sound that still feels fresh, vibrant, and personal.” She made a music video for her version of “Where Did the Magic Go?”, which is best known as a Tony Bennett song. It is impressive that she paid tribute to her late father Billy Ainsworth in this track by referencing his name within the song. And we shouldn't overlook the outstanding contributions of Brian Piper, who is producer/arranger/pianist on these three albums.

“I feel privileged to be able to share my music with you. It makes me happy to know that you might be listening to my music, and appreciating the ‘New Vintage’ sound as much as I do. I hope to come to Japan sometime soon, to see your amazing country, and to sing for you.”