

# AMITY

## ‘Amity’s exceptional songwriting, described as the lovechild of Adele and Billie Eilish’

“Had the whole hall straight away”; “grabbed me from start to finish”; “beautiful piano playing”; “great lyrics - sincere and endearing”; “genuine and personal”; “simplicity - reliance on the quality of performance”; “enigmatic - looks amazing”. These were just some of the superlatives used by judges to describe sixteen year old singer-songwriter Amity’s recent performance at the Royal Albert Hall, 17th October 2023. Amity was performing as part of the young musicians’ showcase, Future Makers. Unanimously, an enthralled panel of judges voted him the winner of this prestigious award.

This accolade caps an incredible journey for Amity. His professional career started only a year ago on London’s open mic circuit. One such performance captured the attention of Guardian journalist Zoe Williams. Her glowing review eulogised Amity’s ‘dense surreal lyricism’ and drew comparisons to Regina Spektor. Subsequently, Amity has played packed gigs at Soho’s Spice of Life, Cafe KOKO, and Shoreditch’s Q Club. He played a headline slot at the O2 Academy 2 Islington just days after sitting his last GCSE in June. To preserve artistic integrity, Amity’s team have rightly turned down requests from all the major TV talent shows, nationally and internationally. Clearly, the mainstream media have fallen under Amity’s spell.

These achievements are all the more remarkable because of Amity’s personal struggles. Over the last few years, Amity has battled with autism, mental health, school bullies, abusive relationships, and gender dysphoria. Nevertheless, Amity doesn’t obviously appear to be marked by trauma. His cherubic, blue curls and disarming smile radiate a youthful optimism, even the innocence of an ingénue. However, Amity is not an artist to be taken lightly. Having written poetry since the age of five, Amity’s lyrics have a maturity and power which belies his years. His music is, at times, painfully sad and profoundly moving. Recurrent themes include abuse, survival, heartbreak, and defiance. Frequently harrowing, these songs also have an uncanny beauty and redemptive character. Fittingly, Amity describes his music as a form of catharsis.

At the Albert Hall, Amity played a song called ‘Almost Home. In his words, this “is a song about long distance love and the desire to be close, together again. It was the first love song that I’d written and as it’s an acoustic song, just me and my piano, it’s quite exposing”. It is a beautiful, gentle song which could easily have become lost in the cavernous amphitheatre of the Royal Albert Hall. Remember, this venue has hosted superstars like The Beatles and The Rolling Stones in the past. Part of the magic of

Amity’s performance is the fact that most young artists would have crumbled under the magnitude of this stage. Instead, within four rhyming couplets, and only eight sparse piano chords, the entire audience fell silent and completely enraptured.

It is difficult to describe the power of Amity’s performance. It has something to do with the vulnerability of a demure youth, sitting alone at a black grand piano, in front of a packed venue. It also relates to Amity’s exceptional songwriting, described as the lovechild of Adele and Billie Eilish. However, Amity’s music also connects to a tradition of great twentieth century piano singers. Some songs recall the heartbreaking power of Nina Simone, others the vulnerability of Joni Mitchell, the mezzo-soprano of Tori Amos, even the ethereal quality of Antony and the Johnsons. The common denominator, uniting all these disparate artists, is they all understand the raw, emotional power of a solo performer and a piano.

Something special happens when a genuine artist sits at a piano; something alchemical. This is captured perfectly in the cover of Tom Waits seminal debut LP *Closing Time* (1973). Waits is depicted at a piano, in an after hours bar, spotlighted by a single ceiling lamp. He sits, alone with his memories, accompanied by only a half drunk glass of whiskey and an ashtray full of cigarette ends. It is a scene of world-weary melancholy, which nevertheless suggests the faint promise of romance. The dramatic lighting suggests an expectant audience, hoping for a soundtrack to carry them through the night. Obliging, *Closing Time* begins with the signature lethargic arpeggio of Waits’ piano, and lyrics of love, loss, and drinking to forget. In one sense, Amity’s music is nothing like Tom Waits’. Yet, spotlighted alone on the Albert Hall stage, Amity not only conjured early Waits, but also the timeless voodoo of the piano singer.

More than any other instrument in popular music, the piano has a confessional quality which intimately connects artist, instrument, and audience. Through the simplest of means, the piano seems capable of communicating universal truths. Like Amity, the Polish composer Chopin, regarded piano playing as an act of catharsis. He said that “[Some days] I can only groan, and suffer, and pour out my despair at the piano”. Sitting at the piano, Nat King Cole said that he felt like he was playing fairy tales. Amity’s own fairy tale is currently being written. Yet, he has lived through more struggles in sixteen years than many people face in a lifetime. This journey is documented, with heartbreaking honesty, in his music. The song ‘Soft Play’ begins

with the lines “She always thought her word was truth / But I’ve still got one last baby tooth / It’s never coming out, and I never want it to”. The song was written to communicate the impact of trauma, as well as the COVID lockdown, on Amity’s experience of childhood. As such, it is a lament for lost youth. Though this was not Amity’s intention, the song also seems to speak of the pressures of a young life thrust into the professional spotlight. Ultimately, this is a song of conviction, personal truth, and self-belief. These traits usually only come through life-experience, especially the experiences of heartbreak and being ground through the emotional mill. In many ways, Amity can be described as a young musician for our times – queer, autistic, trans, and determined to be heard. Amity’s story is one that you can’t help falling behind, perhaps falling under his spell.

**Words: Richard Hudson-Miles**  
**Photographs by Joe Loughrell**

