

# Alternative R&B

by Jordan Campbell

*Amel Larrieux, Macy Gray and Jill Scott exhibit their own style of true soulful expression. Each one adds a new ingredient to the melting pot. Depicting real-life situations through personal experiences and observations, they are able to reflect a broad spectrum of emotions that tap deep within the souls of listeners. Whether the topic is love for another, love for oneself or simply fun loving, it is seen in a new light each time, from each artist. The categorization that these artists have been placed in, known as "alternative R&B" or "neo-soul", opens the door for the continuance of imagination-grabbing, soul-gripping experimentation.*

## Amel Larrieux

The undaunting, unexpectedly sexy and distinguishable voice of Amel Larrieux is an art in itself. Formerly of the duo Groove Theory, along with Bryce Wilson, this songbird re-enters the industry with her solo debut "Infinite Possibilities." The album takes you on a soul-enriching, self-empowering and spiritual journey seen through the eyes of Amel. Her eclectic background and appreciation of aesthetics are evident in her fresh, thought-provoking style. Because she writes her own music, and always has, about personal situations and things she has witnessed, Amel feels a certain intimacy in her art that she tries to share with her audience. "I think I do envision things, but it's also what I see in real life: other people's situations, ups and downs. I somehow try to marry them with my own experiences so I have a body of work I can relate to and the average person

can relate to."

Due to her immense variety of influence, Amel fuses jazz, soul, R&B and her own special ingredient, incapable of label, to her music. She truly cannot be compared to any other artist. The honesty and complete sincerity that is present in her work leaves you with a beautiful sense of complaisance that lures you from reality, momentarily. At the same time, her music seems to have a translucent effect, transmitting spirituality through reality, providing something that we all can relate to.

Some critics refer to her music as "conscious soul," which Amel neither agrees nor disagrees with. In her own words Amel says, "It's not a concept...it's just a way of life—and how I do things in my personal life...it's the way I've always been writing since Groove Theory...it's not "conscious" at all, it's just where I'm coming from as a person.

## Macy Gray

The first aspect of Macy Gray that is most noticeable is her distinctively squeaky and uniquely raspy voice reminiscent of blues great, Billie Holiday, jazz singer Betty Carter and "Queen of Soul," Aretha Franklin. In no way can she be truly compared to anyone because of her incredible and mind-boggling fusion of old-school hip-hop, jazz, blues, R&B, funk and rock. The way in which Macy formulates her delivery and presents her talent makes it virtually impossible to ignore.

Growing up in a musically inclined household and attending a predominately white boarding school, Macy "developed a real appreciation for all kinds of music just by being exposed to it." Her playfully boisterous and fun-loving style compliments her experimentation with other genres of music while exploring the emotions of her listeners. It simply reflects "the basics of life," says Macy. Even though we're all different, we all end up living the same kind of life. We're all in the same

boat. Everybody has to go to work, everybody wants to be loved, everybody needs sex, everybody wants money."

Her first single from her debut album "Macy Gray on How Life Is," entitled "Do Something", discusses the importance of taking advantage of positive opportunities in life; while another song, "I've Committed Murder," playfully and humorously tells the story of Macy killing her boyfriend's ex-boss for firing him. In songs like "Sex-O-Matic Venus Freak" and the poetic ballad "Still," Macy discusses the sadness, joy and spirituality of love lost and found. Not to mention the funky and groovy opener "Why Didn't You Call Me," which explores the all-too-familiar disappointment of a lost love interest.

Macy definitely touches on all aspects of life. Whether or not you dig what contributions she's making to the music industry, you must respect her. She has, no doubt, spawned a creative corner for herself and others to relate to. Macy is truly an essence of soul from which any R&B artist can take note of. She definitely has something to say.