



**Awakening**  
Lizzie Thomas (Goddess Legacy)  
by Marilyn Lester

Generally speaking, the creative output of most artists can be considered deeply personal, but for vocalist-songwriter Lizzie Thomas, *Awakening*, her seventh album, is more than that—recording it was the product of a seismic creative shift. The trigger was a pair of passings: her mother in 2023 and her best friend in 2024. With her bedrock gone, she realized she needed to take stock of her life and figure out a future path. A fine singer, she realized that ability wasn't enough. She confronted the fact that she was raised in a household where emotion wasn't encouraged. Her salvation was music and the gift to express herself in superior lyric interpretation. But it became clear that her asset as a storyteller needed to be expressed not in singing alone but in songwriting. This catharsis marked the turning point in her career, and as she's said, about daring to believe again by finding her true voice. Once open to this proposition, songs began to flow through her—melodies and words heard in meditation, dreams and the rhythm of daily life.

The nine tracks of originals lean mostly to neo-soul and R&B. The lush title song is a flowing, melodic statement, a mantra about the power of love and its ability to create perfect harmony (including a vocal overdub on the word "harmony"), the key to finding peace within and without—and thus to embracing life's abundance through empowerment. "This Love" is a story song of the type that Judy Collins or Joni Mitchell would be pleased to sing. The ostensible message is about separation from a true love, but ultimately affirms the strength of independence through courageous self-love. Likewise, the soulful "Home", inspired by a dream reverie of her deceased mother, speaks to the unreality of separation, the eternal quality of love and the undying connection of its bond. The over-arching theme of love qualifies the album as a song cycle of sorts—but love in the broad sense. The Greeks had quite a few words for the different types of love beyond eros.

Thomas has created a work of wisdom and depth. Her melodies are engaging and the lyrics galvanizing to an open mind. Taken at face value, the collection is still simply just delightful. *Awakening* is an album for Thomas to be very proud of.

For more info visit [lizziethejazzsinger.com](http://lizziethejazzsinger.com). The album release concert is at Drom Aug. 8. See Calendar.



**Bird in Kansas City**  
Charlie Parker (Verve)  
by George Kanzler

Three private sessions recorded on home (wire or disc) recording equipment, one at a private party and two in

studio settings, comprise this release of Charlie "Bird" Parker playing in his hometown of Kansas City, KS, on visits after he left. They chronicle events in 1941, 1944 and 1951, and are presented on *Bird in Kansas City*, given in reverse chronological order.

The first seven of thirteen tracks (recorded by Parker friend Phil Baxter at a house party at his home) feature Bird with an unidentified bassist and drummer. They are prime vintage Parker at the height of his dominance of the modern bebop jazz scene. He is heard soloing at length (the only soloist) in a constantly creative groove, the relaxed atmosphere of the occasion spurring him more toward humor and mind-boggling strings of original phrases, mixed with melodic fragments and quotes. The first three tracks, all called "Bird Song" with consecutive numbers, are actually a blues (#1), "I Got Rhythm" changes (#2) and "Lady Be Good" (#3). There's also a harmonically fluent "Cherokee", a favorite of Parker's; a "Body and Soul" that he pushes into fast bebop flurries; and "Honeysuckle Rose" and "Perdido", both overflowing with cascading melodic and harmonic ideas.

In contrast, the four tracks recorded by Vic Damon in 1944, with Efferge Ware (guitar) and Edward "Little Phil" Phillips (drums), are less frenzied and less bursting at the seams creatively. The "Cherokee" here is a blueprint/template elaborated on in later Parker versions. The real gems on the release are the two ballads, "My Heart Tells Me" and "Body and Soul", each delivered with the lyrical panache Bird would bring to the *With Strings* albums he recorded later in his career. The two closing tracks (privately recorded) of the Jay McShann Orchestra in 1941 are taken from before a Decca recording session. The first, "Margie", only features Parker at the end/coda in a short (8- or 12-bar) solo. But "I'm Getting Sentimental Over You", a vocal feature for an unremarkable Joe Coleman, has an emotionally resonant 32-bar solo from Parker suggesting his affection for a good ballad was a lifetime trait.

Although the sound quality is far from high fidelity, these glimpses into Charlie Parker in relaxed circumstances are well worth a listen, reinforcing his reputation as a musician who never turned the creative spigot off.

For more info visit [vervarecords.com](http://vervarecords.com). The Charlie Parker Jazz Festival is at Marcus Garvey Park Aug. 22-23 and Tompkins Square Park Aug. 24. Parker tributes are also at Birdland Aug. 26-30 ("Bird with Strings" featuring Ken Peplowski), Birdland Theater Aug. 29-31 (with David DeJesus Bopset) and Aug. 31 (with David DeJesus Yardbird Big Band). See Calendar.



**Lady of the Lavender Mist**  
Anaïs Reno (Club 44)  
by Scott Yanow

In 2019 when she was 15, the unknown Anaïs Reno handily won first prize in the Adela and Larry Ellow American Songbook High School Competition for the Mabel Mercer Foundation, thoroughly amazing those in attendance with her surprisingly mature interpretation of Duke Ellington's "I Ain't Got Nothin' But the Blues". In 2021 at 17 she made a very strong impression with her debut album, *Lovesome Thing*. Already a potentially great jazz singer with a warm voice and a real feel for jazz phrasing, her

interpretations of the music of Ellington and Billy Strayhorn (her favorite composers) were a rather impressive start to her career.

With the release of *Lady of the Lavender Mist*, Reno shows that she is quickly moving to the top of her field. Heading a quartet that includes Peter Bernstein (guitar), David Wong (bass) and Joe Farnsworth (drums), she performs nine standards including the lesser-known Ellington title cut for which she provided the lyrics. Most young performers feel compelled to fill up space with plenty of notes, being eager to show off their technique and enthusiasm. It is often on ballads where listeners can tell if a performer is on his or her way to developing into a major artist. Reno easily passes that test, showing on "Round Midnight" that she is not shy to take her time, hold long notes and utilize space in dramatic fashion. She can also swing effortlessly on medium-tempo pieces with her fresh versions of "Autumn Leaves" (which she sings in both English and French), "Gravy Waltz", "I'll Remember April", "Kiss And Run" and, serving as evidence, another obscure Ellington piece, "Take Love Easy" (written with John Latouche for the doomed 1946 Broadway outing of *Beggar's Holiday*). She also performs "When Lights Are Low" and "Poinciana", showing that one of her skills is picking out superior songs to sing. Her interplay with Bernstein, who takes many tasteful solos, and the supportive rhythm section, is a constant delight throughout this set.

Already a major jazz vocalist at age 21, Anaïs Reno is carving out her own path in the jazz world. With luck, she will have many more accomplishments in her future.

For more info visit [club44records.com](http://club44records.com). The album release concert is at Dizzy's Club Aug. 26. See Calendar.

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