



Bringing you the best unsigned artists.

## The Navigator

*Taxi's membership has now surpassed 10,000, and some exceptionally talented bands and writer/artists are emerging from the ranks of the industry's preeminent independent A&R service. Whenever we locate a particularly viable act, we give you the lowdown in this space; the rest is up to you.*

### AMY KUNEY

Amy Kuney is not waiting for your call. The 21-year-old singer/songwriter/musician is way too busy working on her first full-length album, writing songs, carrying a full course load as a music composition major at Biola University in La Mirada, playing out around Southern California on the weekends and school breaks, working with a vocal coach to condition her voice, responding to the fans she picks up daily on her MySpace page and generally getting ready for prime time. Some who have heard the Kuney's self-released EP say she's ready *now*; her wondrously articulated songs, which observe contemporary existence in cinematic detail, her smoky alto, which occupies the same intimate zone as Fiona Apple's, and her deft guitar and piano playing reveal a self-assured, well-rounded talent that nimbly straddles art and commerce.

Kuney's appeal starts with her lyrics, which vividly evoke a world of their own, and yet hers is a world that anyone will recognize and relate to. As one reviewer put it, "she manages to stay personal and inclusive all at once." The opening lines of "Breaking Bad Habits" will tell you all you need to know about Kuney's rarefied verbal gift: "I'm starting over, all by myself/I've gotten sober and I'm getting help/Now I didn't plan this, I want you to know/I'm just breaking bad habits/You're the first one to go." Combining the reference to rehab, such a prevalent part of contemporary culture, with the universal need to ease the pain of a dysfunctional romantic relationship is a truly inspired premise, and Kuney executes it with poetic elegance. She's paired the lyric with a melody that bears the classic lines of the Great American Songbook while at the same time sounding utterly modern. In other words...damn, this girl can write!

Her backstory is as atypical as her music. Born in Tulsa, Okla., Amy was part of a home-school group that also included the Hanson brothers, and as a 12-year-old she watched with great interest as "MmmBop" transformed her classmates into stars. For Amy, the experience closed the psychological gap between professional performers and everyday people and made her realize that she too could do it. Inspired, she added songwriting and guitar playing to musical discipline she'd already acquired as a pianist. But the youngster's dreams had to be put on hold when her parents became missionaries, taking their four kids to Honduras when Amy was 13. Home-schooled and totally isolated from American pop culture—no TV, radio or CDs—she inhabited an interior world filled with books, and her extensive reading and acute observational skills, rather than the hits of the day, informed her early songwriting efforts.

"Before I moved down to Honduras, I can't really say I was that deep," she says with a laugh, "but after I came back, I felt like, no matter who I met, somehow I had some sort of tie with



them. It became kind of an art for me to find a connection with someone and build on that. There have been so many songs that have really helped me through certain things, and I want to be able to write so that when people hear one of my songs, they can really relate to it and point to a certain traumatic event that they've been through, and know that someone else has been through that too."

By the time she returned to the States five years later to start college, Kuney's sensibility was well-developed and her self-belief strong. Her personal breakthrough occurred when she wrote the song "How the Wind Must Feel," boasting a lyric as detailed as a short story. Her protagonist is on a drive with her lover at the wheel. "I put my head out the window," she writes, "Watch the world go by us/Like a slide show." As she puts her head on his shoulder, "The wind is playing with my hair," and as she urges him to "Put your heel to the floor," she imagines "How the wind must feel." That's just the first verse...and you haven't heard how she makes the scene come alive with her voice. To borrow a line from John Lahr's recent *New Yorker* profile of Cate Blanchett, Kuney "has the acuity to sit inside an emotion and parse it."

Despite the skill level on which she's already operating, Kuney isn't in a rush to take things to the next level, nor is her manager. "It's taken time to condition my voice, to find my style and keep it consistent with who I am," she of the work she's been doing. "Right now, I'm just working on live performance, building the fanbase, pitching things to film and TV to get my songs out there so that people can hear them. We're trying to get me to the point that, when we do approach the labels, we want them not to be able to say no."

Kuney is blessed with a captivating voice, unmistakable presence and songs that transcend genres while being relatable in an emotionally authentic way. And yes, there are melodic hooks as well, loaded with big thematic payoffs. Can you tell we're excited about her?

"I want people to hear my songs; I want people to hear my story," says Kuney, exhibiting impressive self-belief. "I see myself taking this far."

So do we. And we have a hunch that you will too when you hear Amy Kuney.

**Michael Laskow** (taxiboss@aol.com)

**Chris Baptiste** (cb@taxi.com)

(818) 222-2464