

TRANSCRIPT  
ONOMATOPOEIA

EP: Amanda Humes - Jazz Vocalist

[TAPE] Instrumental music plays and Amanda sings “Honeysuckle rose” at rehearsal

**HANNA TAMRAT** With a mic in her hand, Amanda Humes emulates a jazz diva. She’s got a blue rose and a white rose on one side of her big curly hair.

She’s wearing a black corset with shiny buttons tight around her waist over a blue dress with small white butterflies. It flaunts her figure.

[TAPE] Theme music

**HT:** I’m Hanna Tamrat and this is Onomatopoeia- a podcast about the people and places of New York City. In this episode, a jazz tour guide preps up for her debut as a vocalist.

**AMANDA HUMES:** Okay, my name is Amanda Humes, and I am 52. And I am a market research recruiter by day and a jazz tour guide by night. And that's kind of a weird combination of things. But hey, it's New York.

**HT:** As a tour guide, Amanda takes a group of tourists on the subway to Harlem. She gives a walking tour of the neighborhood with stops at historic buildings and jazz venues.

[TAPE] Instrumental music plays and Amanda sings “Drop me off in Harlem” at rehearsal

**HT:** She hops on a stage or two and starts to sing with whoever is playing. She knows everyone.

**HT:** Amanda grew up in Virginia. Her experience with singing or music in general was limited. As the youngest of five children, she mostly stayed home to take care of her mother who was sick with arthritis.

**AH:** So basically, I would go to church with my mom. And that was, that was what we did, you go to church on Sunday, and you sing in the choir. And that was the only sort of access that I had to any kind of music was the church choir and, you know, the radio. I always knew that I could sing. But I didn't think I was all that good at it. But growing up, that was one of my major outlets. Music was.

**HT:** Moving to New York was an even bigger outlet for her. She attended Columbia University and graduated in 1999 with a Sociology degree. But at the time, New York's jazz scene was still unknown to her.

It wasn't until she met her partner Jim Thomson, a huge jazz fan, that she got better acquainted with the scene.

**AH:** He was the one that said: 'Let's go to Harlem!' And he took me up to this little place called St Nick's Pub,

**HT:** St Nick's Pub, was one of the oldest jazz clubs in Harlem. It shut down in 2018 after a fire.

It's where Amanda got her first shot at singing on stage with the house band: The Sugar Hill Quartet.

**AH:** It was... I didn't really know what I was... I was experiencing at the time because it was like 'Okay I'm here and... with this little white dude, and... (laughter) and I'm hearing all kinds of wonderful music, and, actually at the time, he was like 'If you want to sing, this is where you sing. You do it!' and he literally threw me onstage with the Sugar Hill Quartet..

[TAPE] Instrumental music plays and Amanda sings "I thought about you" at rehearsal

**HT:** Amanda's partner Jim passed away in February of 2020 from cancer. They were together 19 years.

Amanda has been singing at jam sessions at Patrick's Place in Harlem. Now, she has her own night there for the first time.

It's a Friday - and Amanda finishes rehearsing. One of Amanda's mentors walks in: Annette St. John. She's a Harlem native and longtime jazz vocalist.

Annette has been watching Amanda grow from being a tour guide who flirted with singing on stage, to her start as a serious vocalist.

**ANNETTE ST. JOHN** As a student she's gung-ho..she wants to do...this is not what she started out to do, but by her being around the entertainment ... I mean it's been in her, I'm sure, but she got the go to go head on and pursue it, and not let nobody stand to tell her that she couldn't do it.  
So I think she's a good, you know, listener and she's doing great.

**HT:** Amanda has been asking around about the business side of being a jazz vocalist. But this gig is not about making money. For her, it's a chance to help and have deeper connections with musicians who have been hurting through the pandemic.

**AH:** The first person I talked to said 'you're not gonna make any money off of this gig.' And, I was like 'that's fine.' I don't really care. I want them as professionals out of work for two years. I want them to get paid because it's been, it's been a horrible time for musicians. I'm just grateful to be in the room with them and basically what I wanted to do is I wanted to give them something...

**HT:**  
Amanda says she's always felt supported by the jazz community in Harlem, especially when she lost her longtime partner Jim.

And, this is one way she gives back.

[TAPE] Amanda greets guests, instrumental music plays and she starts to sing "Misty" at her debut. Song ends with an applause.

Theme music

**HT:** This episode of Onomatopoeia- was created by me, HANNA TAMRAT. Onomatopoeia is a production of the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism. Joanne Faryon is our executive producer and professor. Original theme music by Lee Feldman. Other music by Blue Dot Sessions. Our graphic is designed by Sunni Bean. Special thanks to Columbia Digital Librarian Michelle Wilson.