



**Amy Antin**

**Heart of Clay**

901003 HER

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Kat-Nr. - 426010901003-4

**Amy, now that's cool!**

What a nice surprise! After two beautiful albums, both somewhat difficult to access, if only for their being highly introverted - these being, namely, **"Ain't Cut To Measure"** (1997) and **"Pretty Little Girl"** (2000) - Amy Antin, a citizen of Cologne (Germany) by choice, surprises us with the utmost peaceful, thoroughly unobtrusive and yet still so deeply moving **"Heart of Clay"**.

**There are songs in the world that are badly in need of attention.** They push their way into our ears, into our lives and they want to be noticed. These are not necessarily bad songs, but they are also not the most lasting ones. Lasting are the songs that manage to get along without us, that do not use force, that can do it all on their own, that like themselves without getting smug about it. Songs that are present, whether or not we listen to them, whether we nod our heads or not. Songs that already are in their - yes, I dare to use this big word - illustriousness and sovereignty. Every note is exactly at its proper place. Not one too many. Just right. No unnecessary fuss that demands our attention. Only the purest essence. Reduction. And that's how they have turned out, these songs on **"Heart of Clay"** - due to the wonderful singer/songwriter talents of **Amy Antin**, due to the clever production by **Josef Piek**, along with excellent contribution by the many hand-picked musicians.

And here we may find one of the main differences between this and the previous albums. Earlier on, there was but the "lady with her guitar and her songs". Now, however, the founder of the concert series **"room"** is accompanied by the finest of the Cologne music scene, and has allowed her songs to shine in such melodic and instrumental brilliance, that even the sad songs go down smoothly. "Everything that was in excess, whether on the level of solo- or teamwork, was cut out", says **Amy**, and she reports that the production was not just a stroll in the garden. At still all that work, one that stretched over a good half year's time, was worth it in the long run. Also the fact that, prior to the recordings, part-time singing teacher **Amy** herself went back to take vocal lessons and learned to let her whole body to "sing along with her", that she struggled with and even at times fought against **Josef** for a given measure, an intro or outro, or that the musicians discretely take themselves very far back in order to attain what one could call chambermusical finesse—all of that was fully worth it. **"Heart of Clay"** has no boring passages, not one superfluous minute and please, when has one been able to say that about any album lately? Okay, **"Modern Times"** from **Dylan** has this quality, the better albums from **James Taylor** have this richness, and also one or two albums of later **Steely Dan** could be added to the list...

**Josef Piek**, who some of you may remember as the musical head of **"Purple Schulz"**, has brought, with his consulted team of musicians, this work of art to completion; that being to bring the **Antin** Songs to really shine. An accent on the snare, finely-tuned guitar lines over

a lightly galloping rhythm; shrewdly strewn, almost inconspicuous and sober piano solos (“Happy”), here a light drum brush layered over a keyboard pad, or the long-held tones of a country-like guitar (“Heart of Clay”). Here a Doo Wop-type back-up choir (“Better Than Anything”), there a sobbing saxophone (“I Can’t Lie”), here an underground saw-like riff (“Cool”) - in each second the impression grows stronger that all parties are working cleverly with their individual instrumental colors and abilities. No wild hodge-podge, but rather precision work; just a few lines of watercolour-like delicacy, the unbearable clarity of reduction.

It would be unfair to leave out the name of even one musician who has participated here, but with apologies to any unlisted colleagues, let us go ahead and name here a few: **Bernd Keul**, **Paul Harriman** (bass), **Bert Smaak**, **Stefan Krachten** (drums), **Hendrik Soll** (Piano, Harmonium, Fender), **Sabine van Baaren** (backup vocals) and once again **Josef Piek**, just for emphasis. I take my hat off to you, sirs. My admiration, madam.

On “Heart of Clay” one meets dear old friends: Songs like Amy’s “Ain’t Cut To Measure” - the title song of the album of the same name - and one also experiences here a new version of her often performed songs such as “Darkness” or “Happy”. **Amy Antin’s** songs are all jewels that tell about growing up (“I Can’t Lie”), about childhood memories (“Amerika”) and the never ending attempt to want to be happy. “Heart of clay/Eyes of ice/who blocked the way to paradise?” And what is true for the music, is even more specifically true for the lyrics. No prosaic prattle here, but rather the precise capturing of moments, the making comprehensible of what is, actually, unspeakable; the exacting observation and description of the small, secret emotions.

Smiling, **Amy** calls this record her “spiritual frisbee” and with that, she means that she has made, for the first time, a record for the world “out there”. A record that she casts in our direction...a record in which, on the one hand, much intellectual work can be found, but one that is also marked by a tender corporeality. Seldom has **Amy** succeeded in a manner so crystal clear, so delicate, so fragile, and still so powerful as she does here (“Better Than Anything”).

**Maybe it’s true that intelligent singer/songwriters** must march through many intellectual valleys, in order to understand, after all that, that when you jump into cold water, you get wet. **Amy Antin**, the Jewish princess from New York, who learned Bossa Nova in Brazil and got married in France (from there the last name, always pronounced as if it were English), who got a doctorate degree writing about Roland Barthes and who for over ten years now belongs to the musical elite of this cathedral city, has earned, for this great record, a great audience,-for her analysis of herself and the world has resulted in the most beautiful and touching songs I have heard in a long, long time.