



SHORT TAKES



J MOSS

With Christian beliefs and themes infiltrating music as mainstream as rap (Kanye and Mase have become prime examples), gospel artists who've previously remained on the sidelines or behind-the-scenes — generally unknown in secular circles — are now stepping forward with their faith-inspired music. This is exactly the case for J Moss, who is now stepping from behind the mixing board into the spotlight.

J Moss is a proud Detroit, Michigan native who has no plans of leaving the Motor City any time soon. His roots in gospel music run deep, as he is the nephew of the legendary Dr. Mattie Moss Clark; cousin of her daughters Dorinda, Jackie, Karen and Twinkie, the one and only Clark Sisters; and son of Bill Moss, Sr., who founded and fronted the popular '70s gospel group Bill Moss & the Celestials. Even if J wanted to escape the gospel community, it would've proved nearly impossible.

While most children enjoy the simpler things of life, such as playing with frogs, eating paste and rolling around in mud, J's father insisted that young J begin honing his vocals at the tender age of four. Since that point, music remained the focus of J's life. His father had already played an important role in launching the legendary Clark Sisters by giving them the opening spot in his seemingly endless tours with the Celestials. Bill Sr. would continue this trend by bringing along his sons J and Bill Jr., allowing them to tour — at ages seven and ten, respectively — as part-time members of his band. During this period, J was exposed to the greatest acts in gospel and his father began having his boys record as the Moss Brothers.

This arrangement lasted seven years as the brothers continued working their way through school and the gospel circuit. Before they disbanded — Bill Jr. was on his way to college and J was finishing up high school — they had recorded two major label releases. It wasn't all fun-and-games for J, but it was only a matter of time before he truly found his calling. "When I was a kid, I didn't think anything about singing," he recalls. "I just wanted to be out playing with my friends. But somewhere in high school I really began to feel a tugging from God, telling me music was my calling in life."

J had absorbed his other musical skills from his family. He was not only talented as a vocalist, but a master on the keys as well. Furthermore, his father had always encouraged that they write their own songs — raising his boys to be singers/songwriters/musicians. J went to Michigan State University for two years before he became too preoccupied with music to continue. However, by then he had also grown interested in the behind-the-scenes aspects of music and would go on to become one-third of PAJAM — the production team responsible for popular songs by the likes of Dru Hill, Michelle Williams, N'Sync and Boyz II Men.

Success with PAJAM was definitely a defining point for J, but he was determined to not let his lifetime of experiences go to waste. With that in mind, he created his solo debut *The J. Moss Project*. His Christian beliefs and love of God are front and center as he blends hip-hop, R&B, pop and — of course — gospel. Knowing that it is no longer a negative thing for artists to embrace their faith, J Moss believes that the Lord is on his side and that he'll be successful in uplifting the spirit of his fans. Says J, "I hope [*The J. Moss Project*] does for others even just a portion of what God did for me in making it." - A.Q.C. ☆

AMANDA PEREZ

Back when Amanda Perez was touring and promoting her debut LP, *Angel*, she was accused of bitin' the style of another street-flavored female artist with a fondness for the piano — the one and only Alicia Keys. Maybe it was in the ways that both artists displayed a "lady thug" swagger early in their careers or how they spoke during interviews (Keys was called out on and subsequently dropped what was perceived to be an annoying hint of forced "ghetto" attitude). Perhaps it was the fact that not only did they have strangely similar tastes in fashion, but they were both rockin' strikingly similar carrows.

Whatever the case, Amanda was considered by some nothing more than a poor imitation of Ms. Keys. Being labeled a "copycat" in any industry is never a good thing and despite the fact that her single "Angel" was an out-of-nowhere hit, the chances are that Amanda wants to drop a platinum follow-up set with *I Pray*.

Now 24 years old, this Fort Wayne, Indiana native is a grown woman and has survived the trials and tribulations that come with being a child artist. "I sang and performed since I was a little girl," she explains. "All my family was into music, they had played music most of their lives so it was part of my life growing up. My older sister Angie used to sing and I wanted to be just like her." This innate love for music began (supposedly) as early as two years-old, when she would play with her dad's accordion just to hear music. At two years-old, practically all children are still soiling their diapers and learning how to control their drool flow, but wonder-child Amanda Perez was making music (and not just rhythmic baby burps).

Growing up, she was constantly surrounded by music, especially since her family comprised members of The Sombra Chicana USA. By age four, Amanda was already singing and playing keyboard by ear. At age eleven, she had already begun creating her own music with her cousin Mike and they formed the band, The Sombra Chicana Chiquitos. They quickly earned a following by performing during the intermissions of her family's band gigs. Even at that age, the rush of performing live made Amanda want to continue doing music, and she further developed her talents throughout junior high school and high school by joining school choirs and listening to her older sister's R&B LPs.

She had a few quick breaks, but they didn't amount to instant success. After recording a 5-song demo at her uncle's studio, she went on to win the "Junior Vocalist of the Year, Female" division of the *Black Expo* in Indianapolis. However, things quickly fell apart for her. Growing impatient and not seeing the success she thought she had earned, Amanda turned to slingin' rock to support her musical aspirations — a move she regrets to this day.

Her major label debut, *Angel*, featured the hit single of the same name — a tribute to her late cousin Mike. That release featured her playing piano, rapping and singing. But it also found her earning that copycat label. This time around, she's relying on music maturity to distance herself from her harsher critics.

She's lived through her times as a pint-sized musical dynamo and even managed to give up her life as a drug dealer to focus solely on her music, so it is only natural that she begins to also mature musically. While still dropping verses, she's developed a sexier R&B side and along with playing piano, she's also stepped into the producer's booth — taking more control over her music. Perez continues to tour and admits that this time around "it's music directly from my soul." Is a more mature Amanda much different than her former foe, Alicia? We'll leave that call up to the fans. - A.Q.C. ☆