

BOOKS

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ITS NAME

Cherrie Amour puts love poems to music—and lovers on notice

BY BRET MCCABE

SOMETIMES THE WORDS that come out of your mouth surprise even you. "Isn't it kind of creepy when you start to sound like your grandparents?" Cherrie Amour asks during a telephone conversation about her latest CD of spoken-word poetry and music, *ilovemesomewords!* She puts on a polite, TV-commercial-for-a-hospital voice and says, "Life is a joyful experience even if there's painful moments," before returning to her casual tone and cracking, "I'm like, what? Please. Arghh—I'm an adult?"



CHERRIE AMOUR LOVES HER SOME WORDS.

"I'M WORKING ON A POEM CALLED 'LOVE ONLINE' RIGHT NOW THAT I WANT TO PUT SOME OF ROGER TROUTMAN'S 'COMPUTER LOVE' ON BECAUSE IT'S—IT'S CRAZY."

That last rhetorical question is followed immediately by a hearty, contagious laugh. This conversational snippet offers a snapshot of the Trinidad-born, Toronto-raised, and now Baltimore-based public relations professional and poet: serious but funny, casually intense, able to slip from the personal to the familiar in a heartbeat, with a laugh never too far away. "My employers say I'm a fun militant," she quips.

ilovemesomewords! offers the same sort of welcoming vibe. Its 12 poems, with music provided by Detroit-based musician/producer Ray Merriweathers, travel through one woman's take on life's familiar travails. In "Single Woman's Anthem," Amour runs through a woman's run-on-sentence thoughts as she wonders why a potential suitor hasn't called: "Should I delete his number from my entire life?/ Am I overreacting?/ Why can't I be his wife?" In "Sit Still," Amour runs through something like a mantra for trying to take life at a more relaxed pace: "I'm slowed down my breathing/ I'm not thinking things through/ I've turned off the analysis/ I'm learning to relax and not always do." And over the strutting funk backbeat of "Cover

Girl," Amour dances through a positive vibe of loving how you look.

Love, in general, is one of her recurring poetic interests, which started in earnest after one of her sisters passed away. Though she comes from a family of artists, Amour, a *nom de plume*, didn't start sharing her writing until she moved to Detroit from Toronto in 2000 to work at the Detroit Institute of Arts. "Detroit is just like, artists, artists, artists, artists," she says. "And I've just found that a number of blue-collar cities have an amazing amount of talent—spoken word, visual artists, musicians—and it just seemed OK to do stuff there. I'm very much an extroverted introvert, but I had some friends that were musicians, and spoken word was such a big deal, and I just said, 'Hey, I actually write poetry and I always thought it would be sorta cool to do it with music.'"

She tried a little out with a DJ friend in 2004-'05, but shortly thereafter her sister passed away at the age of 46. "And I used to talk to her about all my love situations," she says. "I've never really been the best at it. A little too analytic I think. And all of a sudden it was like, 'Who am I going to talk to about this?' And I

don't know what it is that triggered it, grief, whatever, but poetry about love started coming to me. Always in rhyme. And always sort of looking at the lessons, because she would always talk to me like, 'Well what do you think you're learning from this? Is this a situation you should explore?' I don't know why, I didn't question why."

In 2006, a friend introduced her to Merriweathers, better known to techno heads as the Unknown Soldier, a member of Detroit's vital collective Underground Resistance. Working together they created her 2007 debut, *Love's Journey*.

She meant the title literally. "I think for *Love's Journey*, every poem was about somebody that I actually dated," Amour says. "I do tend to be private, so it's kind of funny that I listen to the CD and I'm like, 'OK, I think I can put that [relationship] away now.' Like, I always think it's interesting how people get married, and I'm not quite sure they know what they're getting into. I'm divorced. So I kind of wrote [one poem], like, these are the things you really need to think about."

Amour moved to Baltimore in 2009, and for *ilovemesomewords!*, which she worked on with Merriweathers long distance, Amour's subject matter moved

beyond the romantic. "I think this one is just about everything and different love situations," she says. "My mom passed, two years ago, and there's the mother/daughter thing. And I wrote 'Ode to My Mother' [about that], and that's kind of brought up some interesting emotions in people. I wrote about friendships between women. I think I'm just sharing things that are not unique to me. Most of us have some kind of mother-daughter thing we went through. Friendships between women can be very stressful. I think everything that I deal with fits what other people go through."

With Valentine's Day looming, though, Amour admits that her interest in romantic love remains. "I'm fascinated by love, I really am," she says. "The online and all these other ways that people are trying to find love. I'm just floored. I'm working on a poem called 'Love Online' right now that I want to put some of Roger Troutman's 'Computer Love' on because it's—it's crazy. I think people think there's all these shortcuts [to finding love] and there's not. It's not going to be any easier if you meet him online or offline. You still gotta go through all that. But I think people think, 'OK, this is going to be easy now. I'm just going to go on the internet now, and I'm going to pick that.'"

"So now you can buy love just by paying a subscription fee," she cracks, before the laughter comes again and again. ■

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