

NEW MUSIC

Sweet soul sister

Amy Holford has no regrets about dropping out of university to hone her talents as a singer-songwriter. Ian McCabe caught up with her

For Amy Holford, there are no inspirational tales of revelations or self discovery. The success of the past 12 months is all down to hard work, passion and a determination to succeed. Music, for 21-year old Amy, is her life.

I meet Amy at The Charles Grey pub in the centre of the Newcastle on a rare sunny afternoon, especially considering the date: Friday the 13th. "I've probably been very lucky to get the opportunities I have so early in my career," she says when I mention luck. "But then again, I feel you create your own luck. Ever since I decided to put my head down and work hard, it's begun to pay off."

Amy has been singing ever since her mother brought home an Eva Cassidy CD when she was nine years old. "There wasn't really a moment where I decided that this was what I wanted to do, it's just something I always did," she explains. "I didn't really understand the full scope of my ability when I was little. I just started singing and that's what I wanted to do."

Amy, who grew up in Fenham, spent time trailing the local busking scene and last year enrolled on a UMT VOX course as part of the Newcastle-based music development agency, Generator. Helped by Generator's Mark Lowry and Joe Frankland, Amy honed her creative skills and developed her business acumen.

"Generator are fantastic," she smiles. "Everything they touch turns to gold and they help everyone so much. After the course I found I was picking up my guitar and writing more, and the songs that I wrote were much better too."

Amy's powerful and soulful voice has wowed audiences at the Mill Volvo Tyne Theatre and Cluny, even leaving Amazing Radio presenter Greg Porter awestruck after a recent performance of her song I Won't Wait.

Over the past year Amy has supported established acts such as Willy Mason and Ben Howard and recently toured the country with Newton Faulkner.

"I saw Newton three years ago in Leeds and I said 'this where I want to be, I want to support him'," she beams. "And three years later I'm standing on the Tyne Theatre stage supporting Newton Faulkner."

"I was at work when I got the phone call to ask me to do it and I was always going to say yes, of course. I was really excited to tell everyone, my dad patted me on the head like a dog," she

laughs. Amy's parents have always been supportive of her career choice, even when she decided to drop out of an English literature degree. "My dad is a businessman so he understands what I'm trying to do, as long as I'm doing it for my own reasons," she says. "He knows that life is full of risks, and if you don't take them you won't get anywhere."

She adds: "Whatever I've dropped out of, I can at least say I gave it a try. It's better to drop out of something and discover that it's not for you than never going and trying at all. Everything happens for a reason. When one door closes, another one opens."

Amy is oozing with confidence in her abilities, but there are insecurities, especially when it comes to song writing. "I'm very comfortable with my vocal ability but I'm always concerned that my songwriting doesn't match up. I'm really self conscious about that," she explains. "I think I often struggle with people's expectations. In terms of music, I feel like I try to impress everyone and I know I shouldn't. I should be going out there and doing my own thing."

"I want to be as good a song writer as I am a singer. I always want to be better."

Amy is in the process of recording her debut single which is expected to be released in autumn. And this month, she will perform at Chase Park alongside Hyde and Beast, The Lake Poets and Athletes in Paris.

"I'm really excited," says Amy. "I saw the poster the other day and my mum got excited when she saw my name on it. It's going to be a great day and it's for a good cause."

"It's very important that people come out and see us. Not enough people know about the music around here."

She adds: "My family runs a B&B in Whickham and we are thinking of putting tents in the back garden for the artists," she laughs. "That would be fun, but imagine all the chaos."

Chase Park Music Festival is a free open-air event on August 11, from noon to 9pm at Chase Park, Whickham. Generator programmes the festival which will feature Amy Holford, in addition to bands including Boy Jumps Ship, Cattle and Crane, and Collector's Club. It is a collaboration between the charity Percy Hedley Foundation and healthcare provider Whickham Villa LLP. For more information visit www.chaseparkfest.com and more about Amy at amyholford.tumblr.com



COLUMN MY HERO



Actor Chris Connel, who starred in *Close The Coalhouse Door* and *The Pitmen Painters*, wrestled with numerous possible heroes before plumping for comedian Billy Connolly, as he writes here.

My Hero? I didn't think this would be so hard! I've struggled a bit with the word 'hero'. A Paralympian? Human rights campaigner? Great explorer?

In the end I settled on Billy Connolly. Why? Because he forced his way to the top of his game against all the odds. His success is down to hard graft and talent. It's easy to forget these days the level of poverty we had in this country as little as 60 years ago.

Billy overcame that and much more to become possibly one of the world's greatest ever comics – and this long before the days of lottery funding to get underprivileged kids involved in the arts. Billy Connolly is most definitely one of my heroes.

*Chris Connel appears in Live Theatre's production of **The Prize**, at Underbelly as part of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe from August 1-26 and Live Theatre from August 29 to September 8. It's based on the true stories of Olympic and Paralympic athletes. For more information visit www.live.org.uk*

