

**AMY LACOUR** Bitter Suite (VOICE) ★ ★ ★ ★

Her husky, soulful vocals, as full-bodied as a fine wine, ache with a heartbreak fusion of fortitude and vulnerability, bringing to mind other great singers to whose league she belongs, from Lady Day and Etta James through Fiona Apple and Norah Jones. And like Apple and Jones, her songs revolve on the clean engine of her stirring singing and her simple but effective piano figures. Within this matrix, the brilliant producer-engineer Richard Barron has subtly and sensitively etched sparkling, poignant tracks that breath with the fluid dynamics of the songs and their performances. Tender instrumental elements such as a mandolin flourish from James Harrah or Debra Dobkin's luminous percussion add exultant luster to these proceedings. LaCour's songs are mostly mid-tempo ballads of deep soul and jazzy melodic sweetness wed to poetic lyrics of sorrow and triumph, such as the great opener "Bittersweet," and especially "One Man's Stone," which resounds like a timeless spiritual. Great soul standard.—PUAL ZOLLO

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*American* ★  
**songwriter**  
craft

VITAL  
SIGNS

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BY JOHN LUERSSON  
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