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Tori Amos Shares Life Lessons

by Larry Flick

New York—There are moments when Tori Amos seems entirely too perky to be the same woman who wrote the emotionally intense songs that fuel her Atlantic Records debut, *Little Earthquakes*. As she fidgets in a large conference-room chair that accentuates her petite physical size, Amos indulges in all of the self-analysis an artist, with a “top priority” major-label album is allowed. She does so, however, with an offbeat-but-intelligent sense of humor and devilish giggle.

“It has been a long and difficult road leading to the place where I am today,” she says. “I am thoroughly enjoying this moment in time, and all of the attention I am receiving. I know how it feels to sit on the tip of a label’s kicking boot. Believe me, where I am right now is highly preferable.”

The North Carolina native is referring to a brief stint in 1988 as the front woman of *Y Kant Tori Read*, a band that cast her as a sex-kittenish hard-rocker. The now more demure Amos looks back on that effort with a philosophical smile.

“Every place you land in life has a reason and a lesson,” she says. “I think that period of time was, partially, a means of dealing with sexual repression I experienced when I was growing up. I have also come to believe that my insides were strengthened so that I would eventually be able to give birth to these newer songs.”

The songs on *Little Earthquakes* trace much of that strengthening process. Among its highlights is the first single, “*Silent All These Years*,” a stark ballad about a woman who struggles to find the power of her own voice and thoughts, now getting heavy play on VH-1 and MTV.

“I think the fears and anxieties we hold deep down inside are not always as different as we believe they are,” she says. “I hope that these songs will enter people’s lives and make them realize that they are not alone.”

Although the lyrical content of *Little Earthquakes* has universal appeal, much of its musical support does not. Largely produced by Davitt Sigerson, with several tracks helmed by Amos with Eric Rosse, the album alternates between simple piano/voice arrangements and complex, melodramatic orchestral interludes. Despite a flourish of critical comparisons with artists like Kate Bush, Laura Nyro and Joni Mitchell, Amos displays her own unique and somewhat left-of-center musical approach that does not neatly fit any one radio format.

Val Azzoli, senior VP/GM of Atlantic, says setting up such a project for mainstream radio and sales approval requires a healthy dose of ingenuity. The promotional plan for *Little Earthquakes*, which was launched last November, is street-oriented, here and abroad.

Atlantic chose to break Amos in the U.K. first. "The idea was to season the project with European buzz before bringing it here," Azzoli says. "Since this is music that doesn't fit one particular format, we went directly to fans of unusual music, and created an interest from the bottom up. What we've discovered is that this album hits a nerve with people; the reaction is consistently strong and passionate."

Now that the album is a bona fide pop hit abroad, and has begun to stir up action here, Amos has embarked on an extensive concert tour that will have her hitting much of the U.K., U.S. and Asia before the summer is over. Amos is excited about the jaunt and the potential effects it will have on her music.

"I can feel myself collecting the inspiration for new songs all the time," she says.