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The Circus Girl

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Tori Amos is her name. She is compared to Joni Mitchell, Laura Nyro, Kate Bush and Sinéad O'Connor. A comet-like career looks hereafter. Her album is called Little Earthquakes and shows an exceptional talent for catchy melodies and deep-personal lyrics.

The interview starts before I know it. The redhead singing phenomenon isn't waiting for my opening question but immediately starts this passionate monologue.

"It doesn't matter to me anymore whether something's bad or wrong. I've been too busy with that my whole life. Life is a test and you learn from the moment things happen to you. How do you react? Are you getting depressed? Do you feel like you're a failure? Or do you think: 'OK, that happened, this is what I said, or that didn't go the way I expected'. One who plays safe will never know what he or she is capable of. If you are afraid to go too far or to show who you really are then you are not living life the fullest."

Playing safe is not Tori. She's the circus girl without a safety net from one of her songs.

"I love that song. Mother. It's not just a song about a mother-daughter relationship, it's so much more."

Like?

"Like..." (she takes a pause to think) "Like how it was in the past, aeons ago, when we weren't made of flesh and blood yet and our free spirits were floating around. There was no good or bad expression, just free expression. I have a certain idea about the deluge/flood that differs from the accepted interpretation. My vision has to do with the disagreement in yourself. The way you can split up yourself, which means the way you judge a certain part of yourself. (With a lot of dramatic effect:) Why is Caroline's green so much better than mine? Instead of this you can also see the expression of others just as a message and stay true to yourself. The deluge/flood had to do with judgements. Some kind of energy is taking power over you when you start blaming yourself and condemn yourself. 'Mother the car is here' means: arriving on a place like earth, where that energy is very dark and attractive and sensual. That's also a part of us. If you try to separate those things strictly, like light and dark, like those New-Age people do, then you are acting superior. Then your hands are so clean, no filth under your nails, no wisdom. You have to unify those two things, that's what I tried to do in Mother. The idea of: If I like it, I hope I can remember. Maybe it happened a billion years ago..."

In Winter she is singing about her father. Which gives her parents a prominent place in her work.



“That’s right. Even though I left my parents' house about 8 years ago. I had a normal upbringing, in that way that I was the daughter of a Methodist minister and all the kids had to learn to play instruments at a very young age. I have never been sexually or in other physical ways abused. Sunday lunches after church. Going on vacation with the whole family. I’ve never been beaten. I don’t have those kind of stories. I grew up and wanted to please everyone. Especially my dad. I wanted him to appreciate me and I was always wondering if I was doing my best, hard enough.”

Religion played a big role in her upbringing. Which comes back in her songs.

“I can talk about religion for hours, because in the name of religion many irresponsible things happened in the past 2000 years. I think it went wrong a long time ago. I’ve had many long conversations about that with my father, in which we had our disagreements. I respect his opinions. He’s a Methodist minister and respects the church. Where would the church be if we all believed God or the Goddess is in everyone of us? Guilt, sin and shame are not relevant. It’s about some kind of completeness, the light beside the darker side, the murderer and the virgin. Seeing those things as equal and not putting a hierarchy there. Making clear to yourself: I am all those things at once. We are all reflections of each other. There are only gradient differences. The church can’t accept this, because she isn’t needed in this vision anymore. Therefore they see these ideas as a threat. But if people want to go to church to feel better, that’s also fine with me.”

Is in this vision also a place for the Devil?

“What a word: the Devil. I find it very funny, the way malice/evil is projected. I think different kind of energies are in all of us. What we call malice/evil is nothing but very damaged love. I think about this a lot. Imagine you are transported to another planet, left all alone and far from the populated world. You will break down from loneliness and pain. I think in situations like this you are capable of an extreme kind of anger. But the Devil, my god, I see so many Christians acting manipulative and devilish. Why the witch burnings? What was that whole Inquisition about? And now we are talking about the Devil?”

What an exciting job: pop journalist. Beautiful young women with enchanting theories about past lives and good and evil. Who is this woman? A sorceress? A witch? Where is my question list?

She's been everybody elses girl, maybe one day she will be her own...

She has Indian blood (Cherokee) says her bio. Born in a village in North Carolina. A prodigy child that learned to play the piano when she was only 3 years old. She went to the Peabody Institute in Baltimore for talented kids when she was 5 years old. When 13 she played in gay bars in Washington while her father acted as her chaperone. She left home when she was 21 to live in Los Angeles.

"I was a typical rock chick. Made a record. Looked like a pin-up."

Tori would like to forget all about Y Kant Tori Read (Atlantic '88). After that record she could hardly find a new job and went to London. There an East-West talent scout immediately offered her a record deal. Her album Little Earthquakes is one of the most striking records this year. During a live 2-Meter-Sessies I get the chance to see how devotedly and passionately she plays her songs on the piano. I almost feel like a voyeur watching this explosion of emotions.

I've been looking for a savior in these dirty streets, looking for a savior beneath these dirty sheets...

She doesn't have to sell herself as a heavy metal chick anymore, because she found out she is at her best while telling the truth, in the most sincere way and with schwing. Now the time is right for this kind of frank poetry. *So you can make me come? That doesn't make you Jesus.* Listen to what else she has to say.

"We can also discuss the size of my bra, but I find it much more interesting to crawl inside my mind and to hunt."

Tori puts her hand on my arm and looks very poignantly at me. Quickly I ask her if she reads a lot.

"Enormously a lot. And of course that has influenced me. Especially poems. From Rimbaud to e.e. cummings and from Pablo Neruda, one of my favourites, to Byron and Shelley, who I just recently discovered. Talking about influences: D.H. Lawrence has been a tremendous influence. Right now I am reading Charlotte Brönte. By not reading the great writers you cut yourself from a lot of visionary ideas. And then there are Dylan and Lou Reed, Joni Mitchell and Laura Nyro, all visionary poets in my eyes. Kate Bush is one, too ,and the same for Sinéad O'Connor. There are so many, all in their own way. You have to keep fuelling yourself. I will never get enough of that. Therefore I don't mind being compared to them at all. It's only human to make comparisons, I do it myself. I see it as a huge compliment because I appreciate the work of those people a lot."

I'll wake up in strawberry fields every day. And the atrocities of school I can forgive...

"I hated school. It was too much aimed at achievements: who could write the best essay... You could never win, because you were always doomed to fail. It became a battle for me. I felt manipulated. My imagination was killed."

I can't reach you. Give me life, give me pain, give me myself again...

"I practically didn't touch a piano for like 7 years, because I thought there was no use. The music I wrote back then was completely different. I did all kinds of stuff and you wouldn't believe it was me. This new record is a reaction to that. I had to do these experiments to be able to go back home, to the piano. I was a rock chick with Yeats under my arm and hairspray in my back pocket. When my album flopped I decided to drastically change and to listen more to my inner voice."

Me and a gun and a man on my back. But I haven't seen Barbados, so I must get out of this...

"That song is based on a true story. I recorded the song in the studio in one take. The musicians behind the glass were completely speechless."

Me and Jesus a few years back used to hang. And he said 'It's your choice babe. Just remember, I don't think you'll be back in three days time so you chose well'...

"Our culture, and especially the Catholic church, teaches us to separate love and lust. We also learn how to suppress our lust. You don't have to be a minister's daughter to see that. Love can cover a whole scale of emotions. Lust, that strange passion, that animal temptation, makes us want to start relationships with strangers. That's the seducer or the seductress in every one of us. Why can't that one exist next to our daily us? That whole notion of good girls and bad girls... The virgin Mary gave birth to more children after Jesus, so she has had sex. It's not unlikely that she enjoyed that, but nobody wants to talk about it. That diversity between the 'mother' and the 'can-can dancer in the Saloon' is so artificial. Why choose? Why not wife and lover, mother and career woman at once? Why not being pressed against the wall by your lover and licked clean - or vice versa! - and give little John the bottle and call up your man and say: Dad, I love you? Why the fuck not? No, it's: control your passion, oppress your lust until you can't even remember what passion is. You can also find all these things in one relationship, but that's not how we were raised."

I know a cat named Easter he says: will you ever learn? You're just an empty cage girl, if you kill the bird...

"That cat is Jesus. He's my love (smiles). He gives me wisdom. The rest is up to yourself."