

Tori Amos in her classic pose: 1992

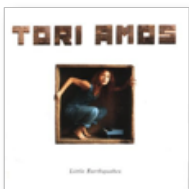


# Tori Amos Finds Her Voice

Amos outdoes her competition with unforgettable feminist anthems

**Tori Amos** *Little Earthquakes*

Atlantic ★★★★★



Fire-haired and unapologetically forthright, Tori Amos stepped onto the alternative rock scene in 1992 with remarkable confidence displayed in her debut album, *Little Earthquakes*. Amos was

the most revolutionary artist in a wave of 90's powerhouse female soloists including Alanis Morissette, Fiona Apple, and Liz Phair to name a few. These artists, like Amos found a way into "Guyville" (a name dubbed by 90's trio Urge Overkill) or the majority-male rock music scene through fury-fueled performances and plain vulnerability in their lyrics. Amos shares an indignant attitude and feminist values with her contemporaries, but is unmatched in her fervent

vocals and command of the piano. Her voice wavers, tenses, and whispers in songs like "Crucify." In "China," she seems to stretch time by delaying musical resolutions and her very brief departure into a new key is startlingly beautiful. Amos's music and lyrics simply bleed passion.

Amos grew up a minister's daughter and not far into her teenage hood did she begin to question her family's conservative values. Her mastery of the piano at a young age labeled her a child prodigy. At the tender age of 5 she won a scholarship to the renowned Peabody Conservatory. Paralleling her rejection of the religion that had been imposed on her, at age 6 she dropped out of the school, put Beethoven

aside and began focusing on her own material. The music of *Little Earthquakes* reflects how Amos fearlessly took things in a new direction for herself. In "God" she bravely discusses her doubts about Christianity singing "I gotta find why you always go when the wind blows," referring to the inconsistent presence of God in her life. This statement is bold considering that women are often not taken seriously in the industry for their unique views. Amos pushed the conventions of music previously distributed by women through her feminist presentation. Her conservatory influence is also clear in pieces like "Silent All These Years." She plays with classical motives, but puts an avant garde twist on

them with music that is distinctly disharmonious. The lyrics express a period in her life when she wouldn't speak her mind and the bottled pain she felt as a result. The music is ironically pleasant, which contrasts with distressing lyrics such as "will I choke on my tears 'till finally there's nothing left." The piece is remarkably candid and powerful and sets Amos apart from the musical competition of her time.

In "Tear in Your Hand," Amos implies that a woman can be weakened by her unconditional love which gives the man the upper hand. Her lyrics express aggression to these men who cause suffering for their vulnerable partners. In this song among others on the album, Amos is calling for change on behalf of women who've felt victimized in a relationship.

Amos's work in this album is incredibly catchy but not on a shallow level that we associate with formulaic pop hits spout out by big and greedy labels. Her music serves as a powerful backbone to her feminist lyrics. It is also appealing because of her incredible sense for what makes a well-rounded composition. She plays with rich and heavy bass piano lines and single drum hits in the theme of "Girl" that appeal to our love of music with a driving groove. The punchy piano hits of "Little Earthquakes" add to the force of Amos's already robust vocals. The bluesy piano riff, glass harmonica, and strange electronic effects in "Happy Phantom" mesh delightfully. Her poetry is never overshadowed by her musical risk-taking and always deserves multiple listenings to

be fully understood. In every piece on this album, Amos drives home that she is a whimsical, audacious, feminist maestro.

KIRA BORNEMANN