

From Amos with love

 By [Eugene Yiga](#)

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She's been nominated for nine Grammy Awards and Rolling Stone magazine called her one of the best live performers of all time. And yet this might never have happened for Tori Amos, whose father had different plans for her life.

"He wanted me to write music to glorify God in the church," she recalls. "And I thought, at a very young age, that we have different goals here. But when you're born and you're playing to express yourself, that's your first language. Music was my first language so I couldn't imagine not having music in my life."

Amos began playing piano at the age of two and performing in bars and clubs as an early teen. Throughout her extensive career, she's come to realise that true musical inspiration is something anybody can tap into. She also believes that your muses can speak to you in the co-creation process if you're willing to listen.

"Different composers and songwriters over the years call it different things," she says. "But if you're able to tap in and plug in, you can hear different music structures. That's what true inspiration is: it comes from somewhere. People who think that they do it by themselves usually have a very short career and aren't able to write for 50 years."



'Unrepentant Geraldines'

Fast-forward to today and Amos released her 14th studio album earlier this year. And while there are different meanings to the title 'Unrepentant Geraldines', Amos explains that it's about being at a point in her life where she refuses to apologise for being who she is.

"People beat themselves up for thinking certain things," she says. "But as an artist you have to peel the onion; you have to go underneath a thought. And sometimes those thoughts can be disturbing. But you have to be unrepentant about that. It's the only way you can get to ideas that hide from your day-to-day life."

Amos describes the album as representing different snapshots of her life and the things she's observed. Her inspiration came from doing a few collaborative projects over the last five years: two with Deutsche Gramophone and [The Light Princess](#) with the British National Theatre.

"During this time, I was working with a lot of people who had different approaches to finding their creative answers, and I would observe that," she says. "And again, it was very inspirational. But song writing is a very lonely and introverted process. So these songs would be the things that I would walk with privately. I've called them 'secret sonic selfies'."

A return to contemporary music

After the classical ideas Amos explored over the last few years, the album marked a return to the contemporary music that began her career. Why the change from contemporary to classical? And why the change back from classical to contemporary?

"I'm not a classical artist," she explains. "That was a life-changing moment in time. I explored music that I hadn't heard since I was a kid. And some of it I hadn't been exposed to at all. These other projects expanded my sonic palette. And that opened up my mind about structure and how structures were being combined."

Amos believes that by doing variations on the themes of master composers, and crawling into somebody else's structure in this way, she was able to understand how structure can operate. This allowed her to go back to her work with new ways to create. It also prevented her from repeating herself all the time.

"Sometimes people only make a few records because they're making the same record over and over and over again," she says. "So you have to push yourself. You have to explore other structures in other genres in order to experience your vocabulary. Or else you're doing the same chord changes the whole time."

Intimate solo performances

Her current world tour has taken her across Europe, South Africa, and North America. She describes the experience as electrifying and a blast, with fantastic audiences who are receptive to her intimate solo performances.

"Of course I love playing with other musicians," she says. "That's a different skillset with different challenges and rewards. But when you play by yourself, you end up in a living room with all these people. You're having a personal chat with a couple of thousand people through songs."

Because each city has a different culture and different energy, Amos believes that it works best when she changes the show a bit every night. There are always requests at the stage door, which she tries to work in at every show.

"For some tours, the set list is the same, the show is the show, the dancers are doing the routine, and that's what it is," she says. "And that's its own spectacle. But this is not a spectacle in that way. You have to see how the power of one competes with the huge spectacle, because with the power of one, you can stop in the middle of the show and change the whole set list. It doesn't make me popular with my crew but they're great."

Coming back to South Africa after a sold-out concert tour in 2011 was special for Amos. And while she's come to realise

that certain places have tense, protective people who won't let their guard down, the Rainbow Nation didn't give her that impression.

"When I was meeting people [in South Africa], I got the sense of a very kind and open place," she says. "And I know that the other culture exists; you're aware of it and you stay present with it. But I see a different South Africa, where the people are incredibly warm and friendly."

Amos concludes her tour in Australia, including performances with the [Sydney Symphony Orchestra](#). But beyond releasing 'The Light Princess' album for Universal Records next year, she's open to whatever comes her way. "You've got to stay present and then plans show themselves," she says. "That's how the magic happens."

More than that, Amos will continue using her music as a means to explore emotions. It's about making people feel safe enough to crawl into 'sonic paintings'. And then, when they feel safe and protected, they're able to unmask themselves to discover who they are.

"It's a paradox but music can do that: make you feel safe enough to unzip your skin and then let the song take you on an emotional ride," she says. "That's how the songs have been operating for me since I was little; they'd take me by the hand and they'd take me on this ride. I've explored all kinds of emotional worlds and I don't even have to leave my chair."

[Tori Amos](#) performs in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth and Brisbane from 11 November to 21 November. Book at www.toriamos.com.

ABOUT EUGENE YIGA

Eugene graduated from the University of Cape Town with distinctions in financial accounting and classical piano. He then spent over two-and-a-half years working in branding and communications at two of South Africa's top market research companies. Eugene also spent over three-and-a-half years at an eLearning start-up, all while building his business as an award-winning writer. Visit www.eugeneyiga.com, follow @eugeneyiga on Twitter, or email hello@eugeneyiga.com to say, um, hello.

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