

## Album Review: Tamar Berk -- Tiny Injuries

Posted in new release, rawk, vinyl By Bill Kopp On September 10, 2023 : 6-7 minutes : 9/10/2023

TAMAR BERK

TINY INJURIES



The 1990s brought a breath of fresh air to the rock world. It might be hyperbole to suggest that the movement was as significant as punk had been nearly two decades before, but then maybe it isn't: while punk rock is and remains an important part of rock history, it didn't make any kind of ripple on the mainstream until it was tempered into what we call new wave.

By contrast, the loosely-defined subgenre of "alternative rock" (*alt rock* for short) did make commercial inroads; radio stations across the U.S. spring up to play the "new rock" format, serving up music that – like punk before – moved away from and beyond the excesses. This time around, the excess was bloated hair metal and (again) corporate rock. And sure, some perfectly good artists were swept away to make room for alt-rock: seemingly overnight, previously mega-successful groups like Dire Straits seemed to find themselves without an audience. Of course it wasn't quite that simple, but the change was significant.

Alt rock was a big-tent term, of course. It included everything from The Replacements to Jellyfish, from Michael Penn to Pavement. But a kind of rediscovery of rock that was both street-level and melodic was a hallmark of the new sound. There was room for grunge, to be sure, but artists who could have it both ways – melody and muscle – were suddenly getting airplay.

Starball was one of those richly deserving acts. The Chicago band's "New Years Day" achieved a measure of commercial exposure, and it brought Tamar Berk to the notice of the wider public. She would go on to several quality projects. These days, based in California, Berk is a solo artist. And while her music continues to grow and develop, those solid '90s alternarock values remain at the core of what she does.

Her latest album, *Tiny Injuries*, is filled with songs that display those qualities. Despite its title's use of a tired trope – it was overused when Prince beat it to death – "if u know, u know" is a rocker that's subtle and seething

in equal parts. Even better is “Sunday Driving,” sporting a sharp hook, peerless playing and a durable melody. Put another way, it sounds very much like a hit.

Berk has a wide musical vision: she’s at home with jagged rockers as she is with thoughtful, melancholy ballads like “What’s Become of Me, My Friend.” That song’s arrangement balances heartbreak and a roaring, splashy character that displays power and passion. And “Permanent Vacation” is a catchy midtempo power pop tune the likes of which Fountains of Wayne once gave us.

The album veers wildly between uptempo tunes and spare, moody cuts like “Cash Out,” ultimately serving up a variety that emphasizes the breadth of Berk’s expansive musical vision. She can sing in a breathy whisper or deliver a sassy riot grrl lead vocal; she does the latter on the spiky and irresistible “Drop in the Bucket.” Her subtle use of keyboard textures is a reminder of Berk’s abilities at deft and inventive arrangement.

There’s a personal backstory to the tone and character of tiny Injuries that informs the music; pain can be channeled into art, and Berk is a master at doing so. But while knowing that story can add to one’s appreciation of the album, it isn’t strictly necessary. The music provides a fulfilling listening experience even without the larger context. And that fact is a key to the specialness of Berk’s music, that it works either way.

Piano forms the foundation of “1997,” a tune that draws both from that classic indie-rock vibe and from mid-period (*peak* period) Who. The unexpected combo organ textures on “Walking Hurricane” connect Berk’s style with that of early Elvis Costello. And there’s lots of keyboard on *Tiny Injuries*; the second half of the album features more and more keys. But they’re always worked into the arrangements in intelligent ways. The loping “Gonna Call It” is full of impressive sonic touches: the wailing lead guitar solo comes as a welcome surprise, and it’s merely one of many such delights to be encountered on what may well be Tamar Berk’s finest release to date.

## About the Author



### Bill Kopp

With a background in marketing and advertising, Bill Kopp got his professional start writing for *Trouser Press*. After a stint as Editor-in-chief for a national music magazine, Bill launched Musoscribe in 2009, and has published new content every business day since then (and *every single day* since 2018). The 4500-plus interviews, essays, and reviews on Musoscribe reflect Bill's keen interest in American musical forms, most notably rock, jazz, and soul. His work features a special emphasis on reissues and vinyl. Bill's work also appears in many other outlets both online and in print. He regularly hosts lecture/discussions on artists and albums of historical importance (including monthly events [Music to Your Ears](#) and [Music Movie Mondays](#)), and is a frequent guest on music-focused radio programs and podcasts. In Spring 2023 he taught a history of Rock 'n' Roll at UNC Asheville's College for Seniors. He also researches and authors liner notes for album reissues -- more than 30 to date -- and co-produced a reissue of jazz legend Julian "Cannonball" Adderley's final album.