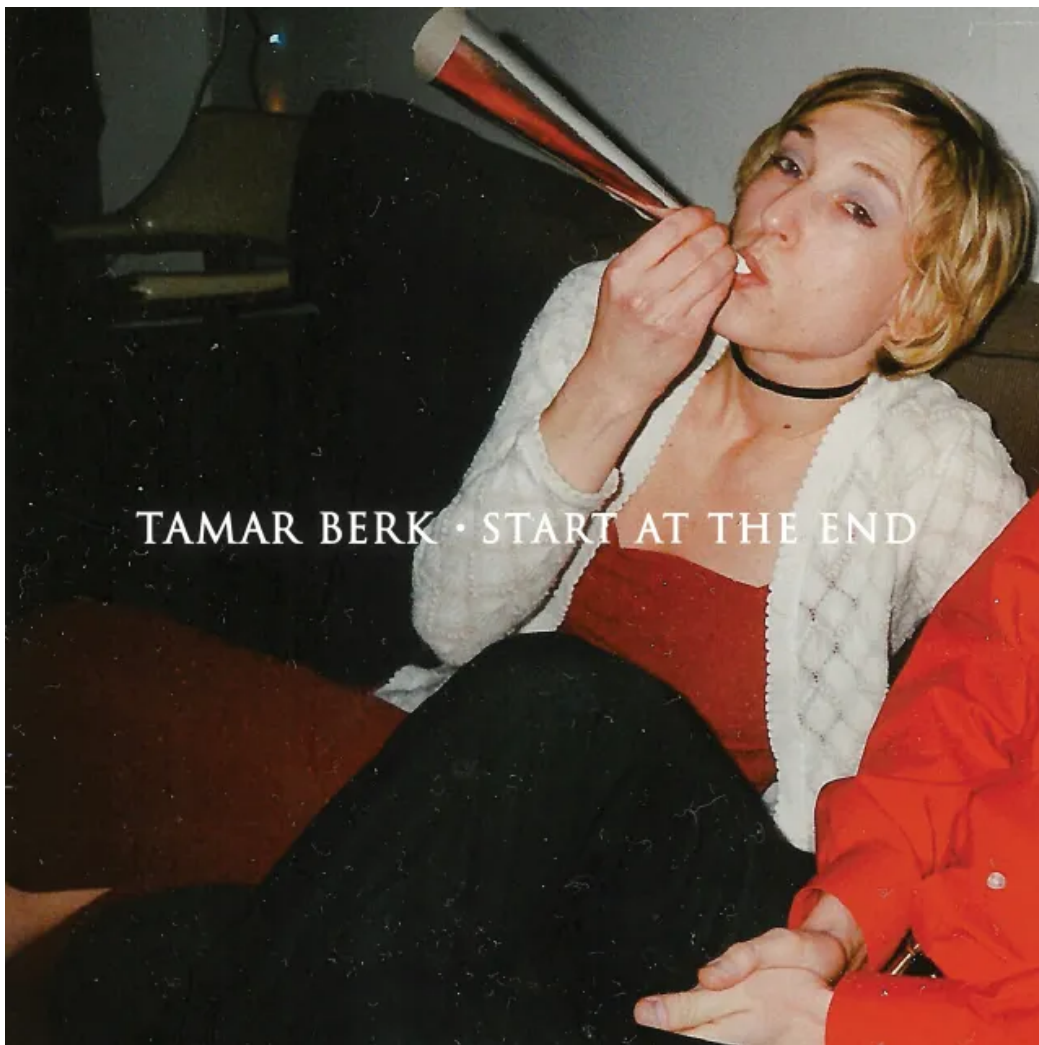


Album Review: Tamar Berk - Start At The End - OriginalRock.net

4-4 minutes : 4/19/2022



This impressive and thought-provoking album offers up songs with a certain intimacy and authenticity, not to mention philosophical rigour. The second solo outing by Indie Pop singer-songwriter and multi-instrumentalist Tamar Berk is good company for its 13 tracks.

Much of the introspection and soul-searching of Start At The End were precipitated by the unexpected death of Berk's father, and by the woes of lockdown life in the pandemic. But there is a universal relevance that looks beyond any specific event – the day-to-day struggle to find a way to move forward with purpose, to discover or rediscover one's place in the world. Issues which seem relevant to Your Permission, the Aimee-Mann sounding track that gets us off to a strong start.

Tragic Endings builds nicely into something of an Indie guitar pop gem with a hooky chorus, handclaps and lots more going for it: “Don’t you promise me that things will work out fine/ That’s not what I’ve seen lately.” Hoping This Day Won’t Kill Us keeps the bar high and the confessional, self-deprecating tone present and correct.

Alone Tonight has a nice Country twang (as does later track Sweet Relief) and is typically wistful but also rocks and boasts a fine geetar solo by Rob Wrong. June Lake is heavy on the strings and more introspection. If, by now, there is a sameness to some of the songs, and to the breathy, multi-tracked vocals, there is variety in the arrangements and styles, with Folk and '60s Psychedelia also in the mix. Real Bad Day has a Power Pop appeal and a Punky, direct method of attack while Wrong Information deals with communication problems. The simply titled Just Be is simple but effective, and closing track This Is Me Trying rocks out to end things on a high note.

The afore-mentioned intimacy and authenticity are, of course, staple ingredients of the make-up of singer-songwriters who strive to build an intimate connection to the listener via an authentic telling and re-telling of their own stories, their own world views, from experience. The tradition goes back a long way, of course – probably back to the first caveman or cavewoman, or caveteen, who saw a shooting star, picked up a Martin acoustic and strummed his heart out (no way, dude – you couldn’t plug in guitars back then, it HAD to be acoustic).

Berk’s previous album highlighted her admiration for a guy who wouldn’t qualify as a singer-songwriter but was absolutely a fine lyricist – the late, great Neil Peart, drummer with Canadian rock trio Rush. That first Berk album was titled The Restless Dreams Of Youth, a line from Rush’s Subdivisions. For all of Peart’s flights of fancy and fantasy, and Ayn Rand dalliance, his later songs were full of pragmatic philosophies and real-world ideas, not to mention his signature “integrity”. So are Berk’s, it’s just that she approaches it in her own way.

There is some quality drumming throughout Start At The End – take a bow Matt Walker (Morrissey, Smashing Pumpkins). Cleveland-born Berk, now based in San Diego after spells in Portland and Chicago (she was a founding member of Starball), contributes vocals, guitar, bass, wurlitzer, strings, synth, harpsichord, organ, percussion and self-produces the thing. Multi-talented, indeed.

Start At The End, by Tamar Berk, is out on Friday, April 22