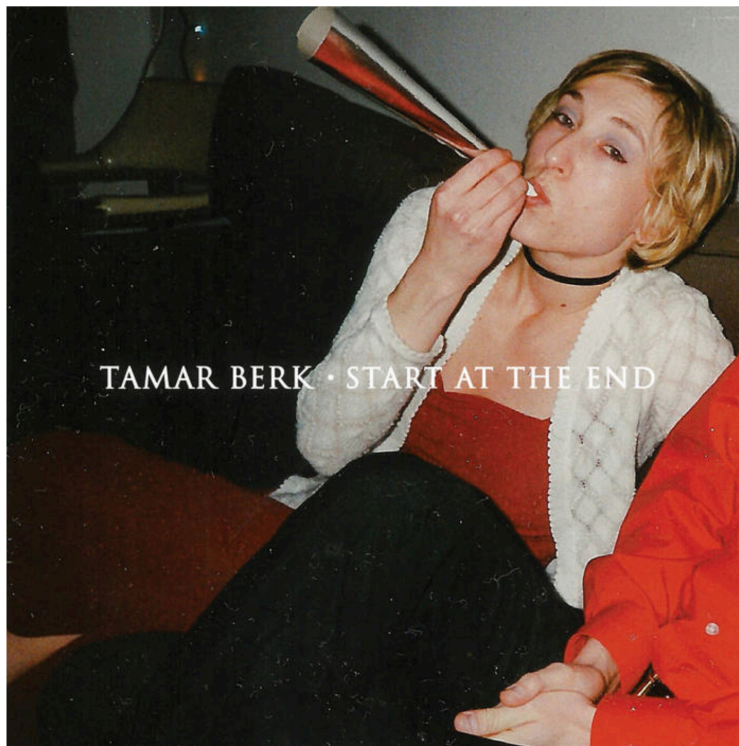




The Joy Of Discovery: Tamar Berk Restores Our Faith In Music

4/3/2022 [0 Comments](#)



Tamar Berk *****
Start At The End

<https://tamarberk.bandcamp.com/>

Album review by Eric Sandberg

In today's world, discovering new music that grabs hold of me like the first time I heard "Whole Lotta Love," "Are Friend's Electric" or (later on) "Talk About The Passion," is mainly a matter of happenstance. The radio is no help. The vaunted "Morning Becomes Eclectic" radio show on

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Authors

Eric Sandberg: My true opinion on everything is that it's splunge.

Michael Berman: Nothing is real. Including splunge.

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KCRW here in Los Angeles makes you slog through hours of acid beats before playing something of real interest.

Last year, I bought an album by an artist named Dolph Chaney, purely based on the cool retro album cover design. Dolph doesn't look like your average rock star, he looks like a cuddly teddy bear. As it turns out, the album made our top ten for 2021 with it's infectious, positive, power pop.

I followed Dolph on Facebook to keep up with his doings and one day he posted a video where he was exuberantly extolling the virtues of a San Diego based artist named Tamar Berk. In the video he performed a ferocious cover of her song "Heavy And Abusive" from her debut solo album *The Restless Dreams Of Youth*, released last year. I was intrigued so I searched the album out on Apple Music.



"Shadow Clues" From *The Restless Dreams Of Youth*

I'm going to roll out a cliché here but the album absolutely blew me away. Berk's sheer songwriting confidence, coupled with her innate arranging skills and use of harmonies would be worthy of a major label push in a better, vanished, time. I don't really want to compare her to other artists because she has obviously consumed a cornucopia of influences and synthesized them into something truly her own. She mixes Indie Rock, Power Pop, Laurel Canyon style wistfulness as well as the kitchen sink into her oeuvre. Song's like "Outdated" and "Shadow Clues" are so good they had me checking to see if they were covers of hit songs by established artists but all songs are written, arranged, composed and performed by Tamar Berk.



"Skipping Cracks" from Tamar Berk's debut solo album *The Restless Dreams Of Youth*

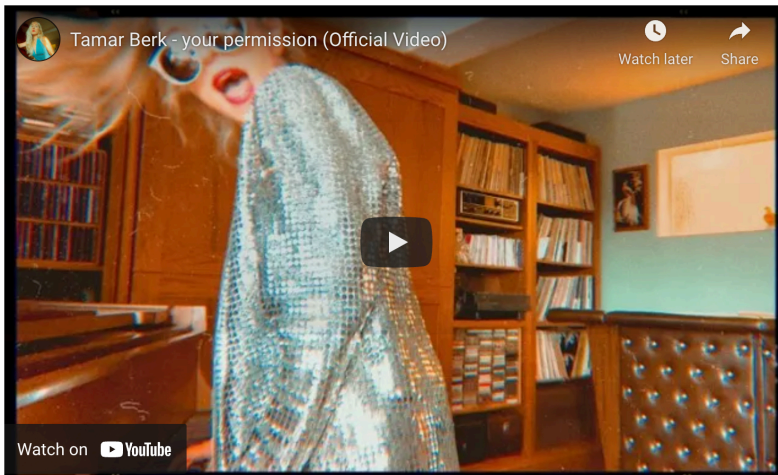
The album is so good I wish I could summon a TARDIS to take me back to December and cram it into Knockandknowall's Top Ten of 2021. Berk's original vinyl pressing of the album had sold out but she recently went back to press with more vinyl and added CD copies, available through Bandcamp [see below]. No sooner than I acquired a CD copy of *The Restless Dreams Of Youth* and just let play in my car for a week, Berk announced the imminent release of her follow up *Start At The End*.

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Lead single "Your Permission" from the new album *Start At The End*

The album is slated for release on April 22, but I am currently holding a copy in my trembling hands because I immediately pre-ordered it and, by golly, she popped it right in the mail to me. No sophomore slump here. In fact, she ups the ante considerably. The opening piano chords of lead single "Your Permission" are like the bar coming down on your lap for a roller coaster ride of brilliant pop songs, from the second single "Tragic Endings" to the impassioned heartbreak of "Sweet Relief," the grand merry-go-round waltz of "No Chair," to the eastern North Carolina sound of "Dandelions In My Flower Bed," *Start At The End* has already secured a spot on Knockandknowall's 2022 Top Ten.



From a figurative roller coaster ride to a real one. The second single from the new album

You can order both of Tamar Berk's albums at tamarberk.bandcamp.com/ on LP, CD and Digital Download and we advise you to do so with alacrity.

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Just Who The *&^% Is Tamar Berk?!

5/1/2022 [0 Comments](#)



We talk to the astonishingly talented independent artist and delve into her mysterious past!

Interview and overview by Eric Sandberg with Mike Berman

For lovers of popular music, Tamar Berk seems to have suddenly materialized out of the ether as a fully formed, brilliant, pop/rock songsmith, performer, arranger and producer. Her 'debut' solo album *The Restless Dreams Of Youth* was recorded and self-released in '20/'21, during the height of Covid and is an instant classic, garnering critical praise from her hometown of San Diego and all across the country. It was nominated for two San Diego Music Awards.

"I didn't even submit it," Berk tells us from her home in San Diego. "I didn't know about the awards, actually. A guy named Bart Mendoza called me. He's sort of a legend in San Diego. He's a guy that hears about things going on around town and he has a show called Music Scene SD and he compiles all sorts of tidbits for various local publications.

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Someone had told him about my album and he called me up and had me on the show where I performed two songs. ("Shadow Clues" & "A New Case") It was Bart who said the album was worthy of consideration for the SDMAs and he submitted it to them. I didn't hear anything for a long time but one day I got an email from the committee that I had been nominated and I was also invited to perform at the awards ceremony. It was great!" I didn't win, which was kind of sad, but I wasn't expecting anything and I got to play on that huge stage, it was beautiful and I'm very thankful."

The album was released to all major streaming platforms and pressed on limited edition vinyl which sold out, prompting Berk recently to press another batch of vinyl as well as a run of CDs [ask your grandfather].



Berk's appearance on Music SceneSD starts at 12:00. She performs "Shadow Clues with her daughter, Tuesday.

All of this made it even more surprising that, by early 2022 Berk announced the impending release of a brand new album *Start At The End* heralded by the single and video of "Your Permission," a sophisticated Beatlesque slab of delicious pop paired with compelling visuals. Released on April 21, the new album is somehow even better than TRDOY.

"I was concerned about putting out a new album so soon and that it would stand up to the first one, which a lot of people really loved but, after my dad died last June I was lost, and working on this album was my way of working through my emotions."

We have, quite frankly run out of words to describe how great both *Start At The End* and *The Restless Dreams of Youth* actually are. Tamar Berk is a rock and roll superwoman who, by day, is a mild mannered 5th grade teacher. There is, however, a secret history of Tamar Berk, rock god, with clues dropped in interviews, internet searches and deep dives into online streaming platforms.



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Cover of the 2001 Starball album *Superfans*

Though originally from Cleveland, Berk's music career began in earnest in Chicago where she fronted a power pop band called Starball [1996-2001] which showcased her embryonic yet already compelling songwriting prowess. There is a lot three chords and a smirk here but songs like "When The Time Comes" from 2001's *I'm Not Home Leave A Message* [Eventually released under Berk's own name] hint at what's to come.

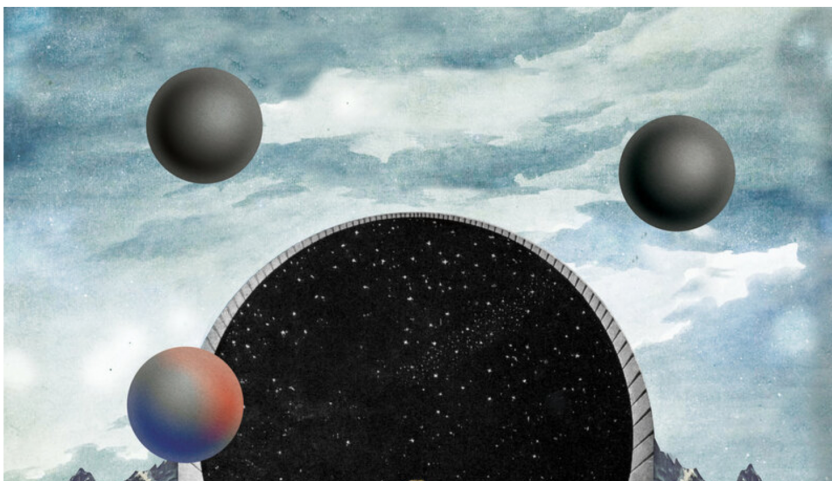


Starball/Tamar Berk video for "When The Time Comes"

Footage can also be found of Berk fronting a punk/grunge band called Sweet Heat and she also played in a Faces cover band and fronted the electro punk band The Countdown. Eventually, Berk moved to Portland, Oregon where she, with her partner Steven Denekas, formed the conceptual band Paradise.

"Our idea was to create a band that was from the late 60s psychedelic era which would evolve into an early 70s progressive rock outfit." Over the course of three albums Paradise did just that, culminating in the sprawling, 2-LP progressive rock concept album *Dawn of Paradise*. The project was so ambitious, Berk and Denekas wanted recruit an experienced producer to helm the recording.

"Our drummer, Thom Sullivan, is a walking encyclopedia of rock. He said "what about Ron Nevison?" We didn't even know if he was still working" Nevison, famous for engineering Led Zeppelin's *Physical Graffiti*, The Who's *Quadrophenia* and *Bad Company's* first three albums, as well as for producing landmark albums by The Babys, UFO and Heart among many others, was not only still working, but lived in nearby Wood River. To their delight and amazement, Nevison agreed to produce the album.





Dawn of Paradise by Paradise LP cover. The album is available on Bandcamp at paradisetheband.bandcamp.com

"We really felt like we were rock stars! We were still an unsigned band but he took care of everything. He called the studios, he negotiated the prices, got all the gear, he booked everyone, he'd say 'be here, this time, bring this...' I thought, this must be what it was like back in the day! It was a fabulous experience and one of my fondest memories of making an album."

Dawn of Paradise is an enthralling trip through the world of progressive rock, incorporating a conceptual narrative as well as sending musical nods to prog stalwarts like Styx, Kansas and even Pink Floyd. In addition to providing lead vocals on many of the songs Berk's prowess on a multitude of keyboards is on full display.



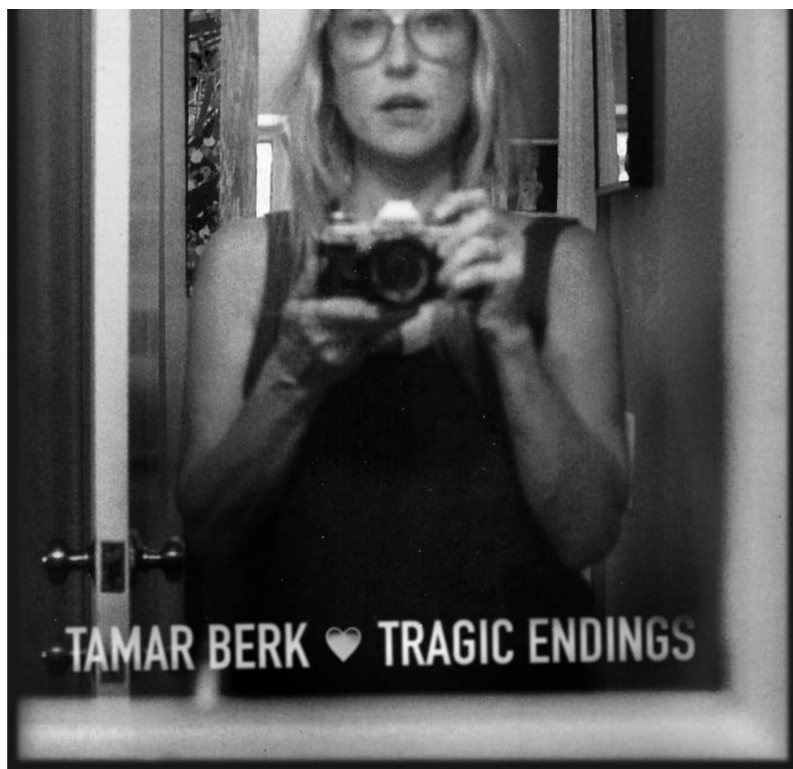
Promotional video for *Dawn of Paradise*, produced and engineered by Ron Nevison

After the album's release, Paradise split up and in 2018 Berk and her family relocated to San Diego [I was tired of the rain!] and began teaching, her musical momentum seemingly in limbo, a pause that didn't last long largely due to Berk's irrepressible talent and drive.

"Well, we keep moving and we moved here to San Diego and, it's the same old story, every time we move, I get depressed because I have no band. I had been playing keyboards in other bands but I have all these thousands of songs I've written and I've been saying in my head 'one day I'm going to put a solo album out."

I got a phone call from someone who knew me from The Pynnacles, a band I previously played keyboards in, and asked me to sub on keyboards with a local band [Chloe Lou and the Liddells]. In doing so I got to be friends with the bass player and guitarist so I asked them if they would be interested in recording with me and working up some of these songs. They said "Sure!" and they helped me find a drummer. We got together not to play live, but to work on my songs in my practice space. It was such a blast and they were so talented. It was so much fun singing again and playing songs that were mine."

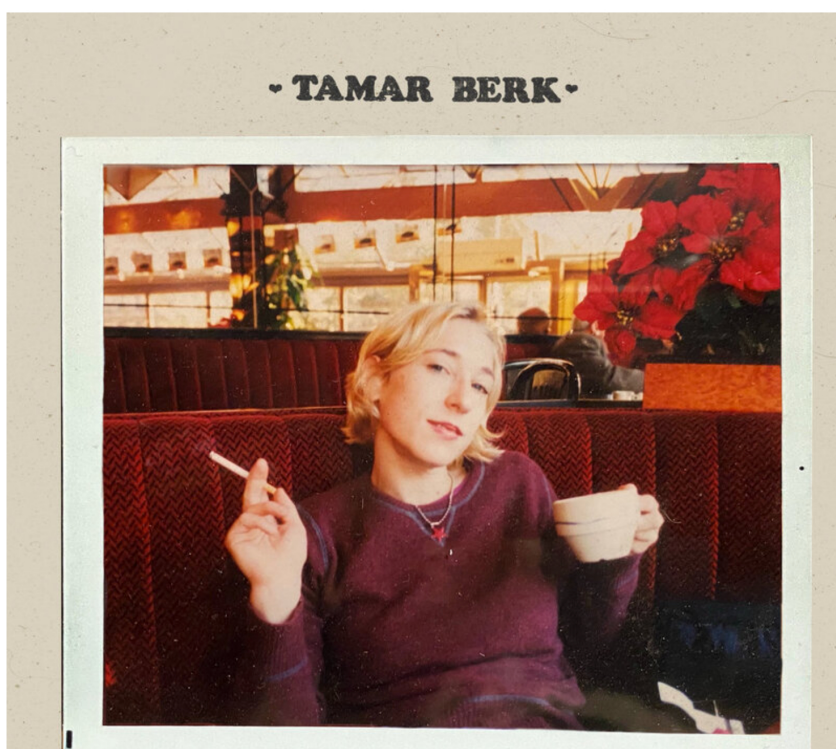




By the time Berk was ready to record the album, COVID came along which made recording the album a remote affair. Berk recorded most of the guitars, basses and keyboards herself with contributions from guitarist Chris Davies playing lead on several tracks and bassist Matt Thomson on two tracks. With this forced new way of recording parts via the internet Berk turned to her old Chicago cohort Drummer Matt Walker [Morrissey/Filter/Smashing Pumpkins/Garbage].

"I sent Matt song files with click tracks and we worked back and forth together developing the drums for each song. Once the real drums were there, I re-approached the arrangements, adding a guitar here and there and re-recorded some of my vocals. I just kept chipping away at all the songs and it all slowly came together."

Walker introduced Berk to Sean O'Keefe [best known for producing and mixing Fall Out Boy's *Take This To Your Grave*] who mixed the record in Texas, where he was at the time."



THE RESTLESS DREAMS OF YOUTH

The cover to Tamar Berk's "debut" solo album *The Restless Dreams of Youth*

This is where Tamar Berk has marshaled every skill she has learned over her music career. She is a master of not only songwriting, playing multiple instruments and singing, but she knows Pro Tools inside and out and has an uncanny knack for instrumental and vocal arrangements. She is also a crack, one-woman promotion team, conceptualizing, lensing and editing high quality videos for her songs. The way she utilizes these tools with social media, one could be forgiven for assuming she has an entire major label type team behind her.



"June Lake" The third video released from *Start At The End*

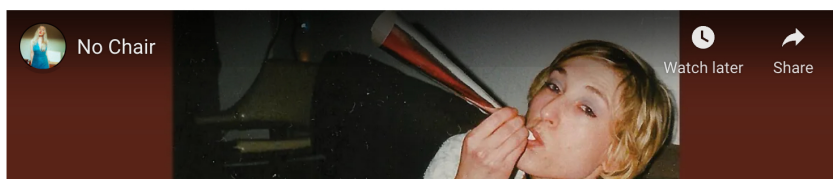
Yet, even with all the work and effort Tamar Berk puts into her career on top of what must be an exhausting full time job, it's the sheer excellence of her music that is getting her more attention every day. Knock and Knowall [reviewed](#) *Start At The End* at the beginning of April, posting some of Berk's videos along with the article, and the reader response was immediate and enthusiastic. Both Nationally syndicated cartoonist Wayno [Bizarro] and the brilliant musician and songwriter Peter Himmelman contacted us praising Berk, with Himmelman commenting, "Yeah, I hear what you're hearing. Tamar Berk is deserving of your effusive praise. Digging her music now."

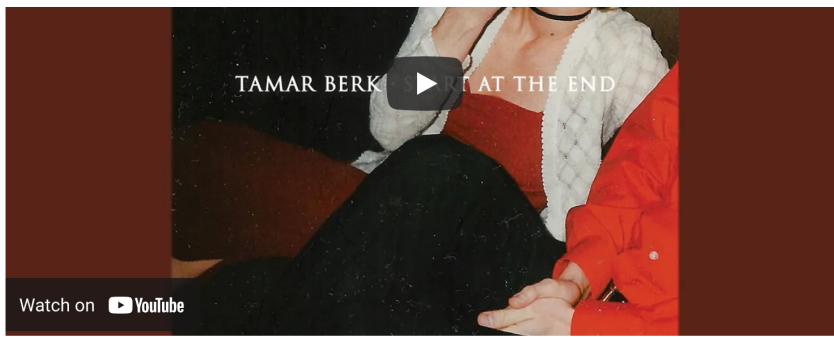
Berk has already released three videos in support of the new album and has seen at least five different songs from the album added to radio playlists from San Diego all the way to London, UK. Yet, one song from the album that hasn't received as much attention is "No Chair" a dreamy waltz about a yearning to feel at home. We asked her about it.

"Part of that song comes from all the moves that I've made, literally, in my life. That feeling of 'I have literally nowhere to sit. If you don't have a chair, is this even a home? This was a theme I had in my mind, particularly when I moved from Portland here to San Diego.

It evolved into the feelings of change...endings and beginnings. It relates to the title of the record, *Start At The End*. It's a feeling of not knowing where your roots are. I was starting to feel at home in San Diego but since my dad died I haven't felt like I belong anywhere because I don't have that person in my life.

I'm so glad you like "No Chair." It might shock you to hear, but I almost did not put that song on the record. I had a lot of self-doubt about that song. I didn't think it was there yet."





The gorgeous "No Chair," a song that was nearly left off the album

In getting to know Tamar Berk over the past several weeks it has been fun to observe her humble reaction to all of the richly deserved praise she is receiving.

"I'm crying! I'm kvelling!" It's as if she doesn't fully grasp how good she is. Berk is a fascinating dichotomy of supreme confidence and nagging self doubt.

"That is me! Yes, you got it! You can ask anyone who has worked with me and at some point they've had to say 'Tamar, why are you crying, Tamar! This song sounds great! I don't even hear that click you're talking about.' There are a lot of voices that have helped me to calm down. Even my child, I can ask my kid, 'what if I put his here...MOM! I've already told you!' I might have a little of that obsessive/compulsiveness and it does mess with your confidence."



Tamar Berk and her band will be playing at the North Park Music Fest in San Diego on Saturday May 21st.

tamarberk.bandcamp.com/

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