

Interview with Tamar Berk

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You have an extensive musical background- mostly playing in bands (90s power pop group Starball, 60s psych band The Pynnacles, The Countdown, Paradise, and more). What inspired you to record a solo album?

I've been writing songs since I was 16, so it was just part of my weekly existence to either pick up my guitar and write a little melody, or when I finally got a home studio, to go and record wanted nothing to do with it. And for me today, the line "the restless dreams of youth" has taken on a deeper meaning because I still am very restless, and unsatisfied, and constantly wanting to achieve more. I tend to be very nostalgic, and often look back at pivotal moments in my life. So it was the perfect album title on so many levels.

How did your collaboration with Matt Walker (Morrissey, Smashing Pumpkins, Garbage) on "Shadow Clues" come about?

I've known Matt since our days in Chicago, while we were both in the rock scene in Chicago in the 90s. He was always in much bigger bands than me, so we were acquaintances back then. After my band broke up, I was starting to score for TV and film and joined a collective of composers and he was in the group. We ended up collaborating on several commercials and songs. He is an incredible multi-talented musician and composer... he really can do anything! I had been rehearsing with a group of musicians here in San Diego, preparing to record the album in a studio, but then Covid hit. I had to go to plan B. Luckily, I'm a producer and engineer myself, so many of my songs were already in demo form, or at least had a click track, a guitar and a vocal track recorded! I knew Matt had his home studio set up so I gave him a call and we took it from there. He's a monster!

During the writing process of The Restless Dreams of Youth, who were some of the artists, bands, or albums that inspired you?

Since this album is a collection of new songs and old songs which were rediscovered on my 4-track demos, my influences ranged anywhere from Guided by Voices, Elliot Smith, early Liz Phair, The Cars, Thin Lizzy, Led Zeppelin, The Rolling Stones, Elvis Costello, Juliana Hatfield, and even Taylor Swift. Sometimes it was a sound of an instrument I heard on one of these albums, or a vibe of a song that I really wanted to capture.

If there was one artist that you could collaborate with in the future who would that artist be?

Well, Elliot Smith was always someone I wanted to collaborate with but that will never happen. If I had the chance to collaborate with Brandon Flowers that would be really cool. The idea of male/female vocal harmonies is something I really dig and I really love his songwriting. I have to add, if I could pick a producer I always wanted to work with, it would be Brad Wood.

Could you describe how you set the mood for your writing process?

One thing for sure, is that I HAVE to be alone in the house. I have learned that writing takes discipline and I have to do it everyday even if something comes out that really sucks. For every five songs I write, I might only have one song that has potential. On the other hand, some days I would literally run over to my guitar, sit down and write a song in like 5 minutes. I love those moments. On my album, the songs "Shadow Clues", "A New Case" and "Quidnunc" were all songs that sort of just came out very naturally. I generally prefer to write on guitar even though piano is my main instrument. I think the sound of the guitar chords leave more to my imagination when writing.

Also, what's your take about opening up to your vulnerabilities as a woman and as an artist in the context of your writing?

I was the primary songwriter for many of the bands I was in, and if I saw a review or if I heard somebody didn't like the band or the music, I usually wouldn't care or take it too personally. But now, I decided to use my name, and so I'm definitely leaving myself open and putting myself out there as a musician, a singer, and as a real person behind the song... now it's interchangeable. I definitely feel more vulnerable and in fact, I did find that I've been way more emotional about putting this record out because of that. As far as being a woman and feeling vulnerable, I never think about that specifically when I'm writing, but because I am, it often surprises me how the lyrics come out and how they might be interpreted. I do find that I sometimes second guess what I really want to say because of it. I'm still working through that.

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Do you plan on touring to support "The Restless Dreams of Youth" after it's done to play at venues again?

I would love to and it will be great to just be in a room with some musicians again. I'm hopeful!

More About : Tamar Berk

Tamar Berk was born in Cleveland, Ohio, home of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, which seems appropriate because she has been writing songs from the age of 16, and playing in a multitude of bands since she graduated Kent State and headed to Chicago, where her contemporaries included alternative breakouts like Liz Phair, Veruca Salt and Urge Overkill.

Tamar's new, solo album, *The Restless Dreams of Youth*, a title taken from her favorite Rush track, "Subdivisions" is a set of songs, both old and new, that finds the woman she is now ruefully reflecting back on the experiences that led her to the present.

"I feel like I'm at the age where I'm still restless, still trying to prove myself," says Tamar about the album's title. "I still have dreams of things I want to do, and that uneasy feeling of what else I have to accomplish. I'm still in that mind set."

Like Phoebe Bridgers, Courtney Barnett and Soccer Mommy, Tamar Berk makes down to earth pop with a knack for ear worm hooks, doing it for the same reason she started – because she wants and needs to.

Faced with a pandemic, Tamar began writing new songs and listening to hundreds of four-track demos and began a period of rewriting and recording, enlisting good friend Matt Walker (Morrissey, Garbage, Smashing Pumpkins) to provide remote drum tracks, Sean O'Keefe (Fallout Boy, Rachel Yamagata, Plain White T's, Motion Soundtracks) to mix the tracks, and Matt Thompson (Mata, The Hague) to help record.

"*The Restless Dreams of Youth* was written together in the music studios and in her own life, each song unique and personal, and yet they all come together in a song of... judged based on shadows, or flickering images on the walls accompanied by a video shot at the dark, wet stairway of the sea lion caves in La Jolla, San Diego. It's also a nod to the hints and tells that serve as missed or miscommunication in any long-term relationship.

The chunky Cars/The Cure '80s new wave pop of "Better Off Meditating" also offers a tongue-in-cheek look at being taken for granted by someone you know only too well, while indie-pop "Skipping the Cracks" examines how hard it is to keep a band (or any family) together, complete with talks of leaving and miscommunications.

The piano-driven "A New Case" isn't ironically, about Covid (it was written before), but was inspired by Tamar listening to Joni Mitchell's Blue (and "A Case of You"), and "Socrates and Me" was a nod to her final, unsettled days in gloomy Portland when she and her daughter lived in their empty house with only a mattress on the floor.

Perhaps the new song most personal to Tamar is melodic, "Cleveland," named after her hometown and by extension, a nod to regrets real and imagined. "It's a strange, bittersweet thing, but no matter where I live, I'm always going to feel a pull, a connection there. I still think about things that haunted me growing up."

These are Tamar's first solo recordings since releasing an extended EP with old tracks on leading Chicago indie Minty Fresh. Her music has also appeared on such prestigious indie labels as Kill Rock Stars and Invisible Records.

"What it comes down to is, writing and recording songs in my bedroom is still what I love to do the most," she says. Lucky for us.

Check out Tamar Berk's new album "The Restless Dreams of Youth" available on all streaming platforms and follow her on Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/TamarBerkMusic>. Instagram - [tamarberkmusic](https://www.instagram.com/tamarberkmusic)

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