



## Tamar Berk Talks Chicago's 90s Indie Rock Scene and the Lifelong Journey to Her Excellent Debut Solo Album *The Restless Dreams of Youth*

[« Previous](#) / [Next »](#)

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**The Restless Dreams of Youth**  
Tamar Berk

1	Skipping the Cracks	2:37
2	Shadow Clues	2:34
3	Socrates & Me	2:18
4	A New Case	3:29
5	Better off Meditating	3:25
6	Cleveland	2:28
7	Heavy & Abusive	3:39
8	'til I've Won	3:45
9	Red Ball	4:18
10	Outdated	2:44
11	In the Wild	3:55
12	Suitcase & Gun	2:15

Tamar Berk contains multitudes. She is a mother, a wife, an amateur philosopher, a former gymnast, a retired ballerina, and a fifth grade teacher in San Diego who equally calls Cleveland, Portland, and Chicago home. Tamar is most notably however a rock and roll lifer who started writing songs in her bedroom when she was sixteen and never stopping since. When she was fresh out of college Tamar dove head first into the thriving 90s indie rock scene in Chicago where she fronted the fairly successful band Starball and guested in a million others that needed a helping hand. She later moved to Portland starting a slew of bands with her husband, most notably The Pynacles and Paradise, and continued to stay entrenched in the



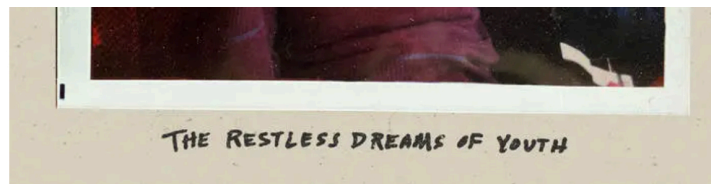
continued to stay entrenched in the local music scene. Tamar assumed that as she grew older and understood the world better that the restlessness she felt about what her life would become would slowly but steadily subside. She figured that the excited anxiousness that was created by setting goals for

herself, from starting a band to playing in a hot venue to becoming respected in the music scene, would be alleviated once she saw the fruits of her labor. However, she quickly realized that anxiousness never went away but was always just placed elsewhere, no matter how many hills she climbed there was always another one waiting on the other side. Tamar eventually came to terms with the reality that while she spent her whole life worried about the woman she would become, the woman she ended up becoming was now anxious that she didn't appreciate the moments along the way nearly enough.

All those shows she played and the hills she climbed have led to her excellent debut solo effort which released just last week, *The Restless Dreams of Youth*. While Tamar has been writing and recording music damn near her whole life this is the first time she is putting her name and her name alone on a record, which put the same butterflies in her stomach that showed up when she was just starting in bands in Chicago. The album is a meditation on how while the circumstances of your life will continue to change and change and change till the day you leave the earth, the person you are at your core remains more or less the same. The project is full of power pop jams that sound indebted to the Chicago indie scene of 90's rockers like Liz Phair with a fresh modern twist. The songs present all started off as demos recorded at every different point in Tamar's life. Songs like "Cleveland" and "Til I've Won" started off as four track demos recorded in her Chicago apartment sometime in the mid 90s and sit beautifully next to tracks like "Outdated" and "Skipping the Cracks" both of which she wrote in the past few years. One of the album's newest cuts, "Shadow Clues", was inspired by teaching her students Plato's allegory of the cave, and was fatefully the song that left her feeling confident enough to pursue the full solo album project. After hearing a produced version of her demo she started jumping for joy and digging for old demos worth dusting off, feeling like she had something special on her hands. The one major change in her sensibilities Tamar noted was she no longer felt precious or rigid about her music as she did when she was getting started. Where she once would never dream of changing an aspect of a song she saw as finished Tamar now loves to tinker, even mentioning she'd love to update a couple old Starball songs, realizing that both her and her art are ultimately works in progress. The end result of her debut solo record was well worth the lifelong journey it took to get here. *The Restless Dreams of Youth* plays like a greatest hits record from a 90s rock star you would have heard on the radio growing up, but luckily for us it is rather the debut from a woman who said she still has plenty of songs to write. She even mentioned she already feels a few new topics she wants to write about starting to bubble out of her, still as restless as ever.

We had the good fortune to talk to Tamar about her life and this excellent debut record. We talked about everything from playing shows in Chicago with Gavin Rossdale and Keanu Reeves to her favorite part of quarantine being jamming with her daughter who is in a band of her own.





**GSC:** What is your name and how do you identify?

**TAMAR:** I am Tamar Berk, I identify as she/her.

**GSC:** You have been in a number of bands leading up to this solo effort. What are your earliest musical memories?

**TAMAR:** Piano lessons at a really young age. All three of us, we were three young girls, and we all did piano lessons. It was just something everyone did, most parents sent their kids to piano. I really liked it. My issue was I was very, I couldn't sit still or focus really well so I had to have the teacher play songs over and over again and I'd learn a little bit at a time by memorization. I wasn't great at technique but once I heard it a couple times I'd figure out where my fingers had to go because it didn't sound right. I do remember fond memories of piano, but the recitals were horrifying. That might be true of all little kids though, I was five when I started piano.

**GSC:** And all your sisters too, that's fun. Were you competitive at all about it or did you gravitate to it more than the other two?

**TAMAR:** I think my oldest sister took it seriously, she went into competitive piano playing, like classical. I kept it up through my teens not with lessons but would just play. My other sister kinda stopped when she was young, I don't think my parents could afford lessons for all of us if we weren't showing a deep interest in it. I got into gymnastics and all these physical things too because I was such a spaz, so they were like "okay you can pick one thing." But piano was something that I'd always and still do, I'll pick up that old book and play something.

**GSC:** What is your primary instrument these days? The guitar?

**TAMAR:** I would say I am most skilled at piano. I can play rhythm guitar really well and I write on guitar. There are a lot of reasons I write on guitar, when you play a bar chord that isn't specific to adding that third in or adding that seventh in it's a very open chord and allows you to play with melody a lot more. On piano it's telling you a sort of specific way you need to go with it, at least for me, so I find writing on guitar gives me a lot more freedom, even if my first instrument is still the piano.

**GSC:** I was talking to [Elise from Oceanator](#) and she similarly talked about how her guitar written and piano written songs come out, like two different sides of her brain, and similarly how getting lessons in one and not the other early on affects how she plays both instruments to this day.

**TAMAR:** Absolutely, because I never took guitar lessons so I was teaching myself with this little chord book in Chicago. Just trying to make cool chords and getting my fingers to do the right thing and hearing it and trying to get better. Sometimes the less you know the more free you are in trying to write, and because I know so much about piano and theory, I like to leave a little mystery with the guitar, it's more fun for me to write on the guitar.

**GSC:** Totally, it's funny how similar that is. For the uninitiated could you quickly run us through your musical history? I know you've been in a number of bands, from Starball to The Pynacles, to Paradise, and you have been on a number of stellar indie labels.



**TAMAR:** So I started writing on guitar very young, like 16, on my little cassette. Writing stuff that was very Edie Brickell-ish. I really liked Edie and Suzanne Vega and stuff, this is before I moved to Chicago, cuz I went to Kent State. I'd sit in my room in high school and college writing these songs. I graduated a year early from college to pursue ballet. So a lot of the downtime I

was writing songs on the guitar. Then I moved to Chicago after college and the rock scene and albums coming out, I desperately wanted that to be a part of my life. I moved towards purchasing an electric guitar and buying a four track tape and I was living alone didn't have any help just figuring it out. Before I had the four track I had a boombox and another tape deck and I'd record one thing to a tape and record over that and those are actually the mechanics of a four track tape but I didn't even know I was doing that till someone was like "You should buy a four track tape Tamar." So I bought a four track and didn't leave my apartment. Like I went to work at this awful restaurant, came home, and was just writing, writing, writing. I dreamt of being in a band. So I'd put these songs out and would dream about it and probably in '93ish I had a boyfriend at the time who played lead guitar and I was playing rhythm guitar so we started learning some songs, got a drummer and that was the first version of Starball, two guitars and a drummer. Similar to the Sleater-Kinney set up. Eventually that turned into a full-fledged band, Starball was around for a long time. Within that timeframe I started another band with my husband named The Countdown which was an electro punk band, I was also guesting in a bunch of different bands in Chicago. Eventually when I moved to Portland we kept the Countdown going and I joined The Pinnacles and me and my husband started Paradise. I was in a slew of other bands while I was in Portland that were so much fun, one called the Deb Leopards. We covered Def Leppard songs in a very odd way, in fact we even did a sea shanty version of "Pour Some Sugar On It".

**GSC:** You were ahead of the time.

**TAMAR:** We were! [It's on YouTube](#). I was also in Deep Joy which was a Small Faces cover band, they're like a mod band from the 60s. And I guested in so much stuff. Pinnacles had a great run, we're still together technically, we [just released a seven inch](#) but they're there in Portland and I'm here in San Diego. We will probably release another seven inch, with like a cover and an original.

**GSC:** I really like the cover of *The Restless Dreams of Youth* and how it ties into the name of the record. Can you talk about that image? I understand you're in a café in Paris.

**TAMAR:** So that was a trip that I think was for one person in the relationship thinking it was going to be fun and save the relationship and for me was the realization that it was over. And it was a long term one, it was the fifth year we had been living together. The trip itself was heavy but it was still so beautiful so I have all these memories of helplessness, where I am with this person where I know this is the end, and there were a lot of hard moments on this trip for me personally, even as beautiful and nice as the trip was on the surface. We were in this café where you could smoke inside and everyone was smoking, I smoked back then and it was so the thing to do. We were drinking wine and having coffee and eating all afternoon. I think with this relationship, as with far too many, one party was in it more than the other. The conversation was just going in circles when he shot that picture. I saw it recently and was like woah I remember that day, and that feeling, and the heartbreaking conversation and yet I remember how awesome that trip was in a weird way. When you're living your life things feel so heavy and hard but when you look back knowing you got through it you realize the things that were still great parts of your life, even if aspects were shitty they still made me who I am. I love that image so much, it's one of the only ones from that trip that captures it so well. And it wasn't even taken by me, it was taken by my ex.

**GSC:** Hopefully he doesn't come back for photo credit and some royalties. I love that though, I definitely have similar pictures in my life.

**TAMAR:** Thank you, I hope people connect with it. I think people will, you look back at your life and you have these weirdly monumental moments that stick with you and you don't even really know why, they could be really small and yet why do they keep popping up, why do you remember the smell of something so often, I can't even really explain it. Meanwhile my friends will be like "Do you remember when we did this or that" and I'll be like nope! Not at all. I wish I knew why our brains are selective in that way, I find it fascinating.

**GSC:** And the name of the record *The Restless Dreams of Youth*, what does that name mean to you?

**TAMAR:** Rush believe it or not is one of my favorite bands and on their album *Signals* is one of my favorite songs I've listened to twice a week since its come out called "Subdivisions". The chorus is about living in the suburbs feeling like you don't fit in with everyone who wants to be a certain way that you don't. leaving you feeling like a freak. The song talks about how

those kids can never make it in the suburbs and how there is no peace for them there. The line is, and let me read the chorus, "Any escape might help to soothe the unattractive truth, but the suburbs have no charms to soothe the restless dreams of youth." Growing up in areas outside the city I just felt that so strongly. It's definitely different now, with people trying to be as unique as possible. There are no rules anymore but back in the day you wanted to fit in, it's like all those John Hughes movies. I realized there are two meanings to the title. When you're young you are restless about the dreams you have and when you're older you're feeling restless about your youth. That's why it really resonated with me aside from really loving Rush. Thank you for asking about the album title because I love that song and line so much and just felt it so strongly.

**GSC:** I love that, it's both a reflection of who you are now looking back at who you once were and who you once were thinking about who you would become and how you're equally restless for completely different reasons.

**TAMAR:** Yes and I still am. I just had a total mental breakdown earlier this week about this album coming out and like I still feel that kind of restlessness and lack of satisfaction that's still in me. I just think some people are like that.

**GSC:** On that subject how does it feel to have this album about to come out? Are you feeling more relieved now?

**TAMAR:** I'll be honest, when I talk to somebody like you who really enjoyed it I feel like crying and am so happy because someone out there really got it. And like not a friend or my mom or dad or whatever being nice but someone who really connected with it I didn't know, and I am feeling better this week talking to people who've heard it and are feeling it. I'd say my anxiety level is still pretty high. I read this review that just came out today and somebody wrote something that really struck me. I had cried about this feeling trying to write hoping that people get it but the stars never aligned for me to get my work out there like this. And reading that review I was just so overjoyed knowing like okay some people are going to get it. I think my freak outs this week were just like going into oblivion. There are so many great artists out there, thousands of them, and it does take people like you to reach out and give them a little bit of that platform. I've been writing music for so long and a lot of people know me, Starball did great and the Pinnacles did great, but to put your name on something and say Tamar Berk, I almost considered using a band name but I was like no I gotta do this. And it's scary!

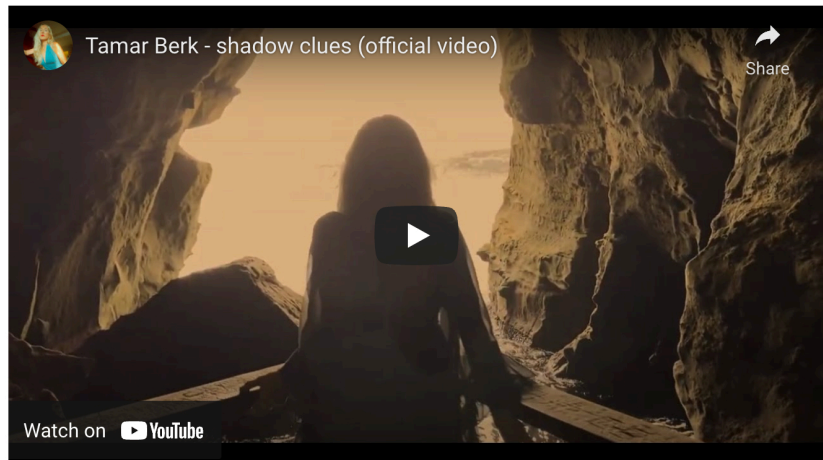
**GSC:** What felt right about now to be releasing this album under your name?

**TAMAR:** The songs feel really true to who I am right now. When I listen to the lyrics I feel like it's what I am trying to say right now. I don't feel embarrassed or insecure about putting my name behind it or feel the need to hide behind a band name. A lot of people who are solo artists do wanna use band names. Which I get, you might be afraid to say "This is what I am saying about me". I made a conscious decision to go with Tamar Berk on this record because that is exactly what I wanted to do and I'll eat it if need be. But I was really proud of the songs.

**GSC:** Everyone's contributions to the record are fantastic. I know you had a couple friends helping out, Matt Walker and Sean O'Keefe you shouted out in another interview. What went into putting together the team for this record?

**TAMAR:** So all of these songs were in demo form, a lot already had click tracks. They might have had bass or guitars or piano. I decided I was going to record in a studio here in San Diego and we started rehearsing in December of 2019. I was working with Chris Davies on guitar, my friend Ron Silva on bass, and this guy on drums I had just met and COVID hit, so I couldn't do it old fashioned in the studio. So I was talking to my friend Matt Thompson who is a recording engineer. I asked him what to do and he said for the most part people are sending drum tracks over the wire and you know a lot of people, why don't you start there. Once you have drums the song can come together, and Matt is a true artist. Other than being an amazing drummer he's an amazing musician in his own right, he's put out instrumental records that are phenomenal. We met in the scene in Chicago and were in a composing group for musicians who made music for film and tv so we worked together on projects before, we just gelled and got along and worked fast and communicated well. I said do you have time now, because he is never home, he's on tour with Morrissey, or Garbage, or the Smashing Pumpkins so the fact that COVID happened meant he was home and needed money. He was like fuck yea I'll play on the record. The first track I sent him was "Shadow Clues" and that track had been around for a while without drums. I literally had no idea what to do on the drums and he

came back with all these amazing options and ideas where I was like "Oh my god this is gonna happen!" So we'd send back tracks over ProTools and then I talked to Matt Walker who came out to help with vocal and guitar tracking and he played bass on two tracks. He was gonna mix it but some tracks I ended up starting the session completely over. "Outdated" that's the fourth version of "Outdated" cause I wasn't hitting the right tempo. Thompson was going to mix it but I had a bit of a different vision and Matt Walker had worked with Sean O'Keefe together before and Sean has done Plain White T's and Rachel Yamagata, and that band from the Chicago suburbs... I forget what they're called. They had some huge hits... okay I gotta look it up, you'll laugh when I figure this out... Fall Out Boy. Fall Out Boy, Plain White T's, Hawthorne Heights, Motion City Soundtrack. He just knows pop rock really well and he's a Chicago guy. Matt Walker was like if Sean's not busy he'd be great and we connected and it was amazing. Every weird thing where I was like "I want it to sound like this and this" he'd be all over it. Mixing is the worst part of the record for me, some people love it but I don't. "Shadow Clues" and "Heavy and Abusive" were older songs but when I heard "Shadow Clues" that's when I started jumping up and down feeling like I could do this.



**GSC:** Sticking with "Shadow Clues" you wrote that about teaching Plato's allegory of the cave and "Socrates and Me" obviously talks about Socrates. Is there something about Greek philosophy you find particularly inspiring?

**TAMAR:** I think its philosophy in general. The idea of sitting and thinking about ideas. People don't do that anymore. Being a philosopher was a joke forever.

**GSC:** I was a philosophy minor in college so I feel that.

**TAMAR:** I bet, and I love that idea of just thinking about thoughts. That people could sit and have ideas about things and get really deep in an argument or thought about it, people just don't do that anymore. Also I think the self, Socrates really spoke to that, and at the time that song was being written I was completely out of sync. It was the end of the school year and we were moving to San Diego. I was living out of boxes sleeping on a bare mattress on the floor. That song is very Portland and philosophical for me. And Plato's Cave, I do tend to have communication issues with people I love. I assume things of people, I assume things about what they might think of me all the time, and I think a lot of insecure people do that. So I thought wouldn't it be cool if I could see the shadow of someone and just know what they were thinking.

**GSC:** You were talking about this record being older demos and newer tracks. What is the oldest song on the record and what is the freshest and how would you compare them?

**TAMAR:** I guess the oldest song would be "Till I've Won" or "Cleveland" but the original demos don't sound anything like what they became. On "Cleveland" I loved the verses but didn't like the chorus, it wasn't resonating with me anymore. Same with "Till I've Won", wrote a new chorus and bridge for that. Those demo tapes are from 90 something, 1990 whatever. "Heavy and Abusive" is old but not too old but is older, and the bridge is new. So nothing was like complete. The newest songs on the album are "Shadow Clues" "Outdated" "Skipping the Cracks".

**GSC:** That's a great intro.

**TAMAR:** Thank you! "Better off Meditating" had a different chorus I wasn't digging. That's

what I learned is I used to get very attached to the way songs were and as I became thoughtful about how the songs were I realized they can constantly change. "Socrates" is new, "Red Ball" is an oldie where the new drums really put that together. "In The Wild" is new and "Suitcase and Gun" is probably older too.

**GSC:** I really love "Better off Meditating" was that based on a specific day or a general state of mind?



**TAMAR:** When you're in a relationship for a really long time and you start to take one another for granted you can tell when they aren't really there listening or being there for you. And you aren't mad at them, it's not going to be a fight, but I can get so frustrated when I wanna have a conversation but that person is not into it. It came from one of those days where I was like "I should go get through this myself right now because I am not getting the support I need." It probably happens to every couple where the person you need to give you support isn't in the same place as you to really sit down, it's definitely based on more than one occasion.

**GSC:** I love that, the self-awareness of it, and realizing the energy they're giving off doesn't have to do with you.

**TAMAR:** Thank you for appreciating that because it wasn't like a fight or anger but more like "Okay, this is the situation, been here before, I better do something else to deal with this."

**GSC:** Another favorite is "Red Ball" I love the twang of it, it's a good switch up for the vibe.

**TAMAR:** That was intentional. The demo was guitar me and vocals, but I had it all in my head. When I was jamming with the guys in the garage putting it together I said I want it to have the following influences: Rolling Stones, Thin Lizzy, and the Cars. I want Rolling Stone verses, a Thin Lizzy chorus, and the last verse to be the Cars. And we were specific with the drums, I am not a great drummer but recorded a general demo of what I had in mind. Matt knew literally exactly what I wanted, like when the Cars turn the beat around in "Just What I Needed". I really liked that because I always wanted to do a straight up rock and roll song. I am so happy you like that song, my daughter had said it was such an interesting song with so many vibes to it.

**GSC:** More of a general question, of all the bands you've been in previously, which does "The Restless Dreams of Youth" remind you of the most?

**TAMAR:** I would have to say the natural maturity of Starball. We were this glittery pop rock, every song was poppy. When I look back at some of those songs they're really good but they're really similar in sound. Now that I've had so much experience I feel like I could take some of those songs and like change them into something new. But I definitely feel like it connects to the Starball work the most because it is my voice.

**GSC:** And that cleanly leads me into my next question, I saw an old insta of yours where you were playing with a little band named Dogstar with a then not so well known bassist named Keanu Reeves. What do you remember about that show? Was Keanu a good guy?

**TAMAR:** He was chill, and cool, and handsome. A lot smaller and thinner than I guessed. He's short, I think Jody, my bass player, was taller than him, I think he was only like 5'5". He was super chill, not very talkative. People were making fun of us because like Starball Dogstar. It was at the Hard Rock Café in Chicago, it was a weird place to play because it didn't have the cool factor of like Empty Bottle or Double Door. And he was huge then, I think they made a conscious effort to not advertise him being in the band, like it wasn't like Dogstar with Keanu Reeves. But we had fun, we had a lot of fun.

**GSC:** Any other shows from your past that are great stories?

**TAMAR:** There is one show with my band Countdown where we played with Bush's new band, Gavin Rossdale's new band they were called Institute. After Bush he started this band but of course he'd close with Bush songs. The Countdown was like this electro-punk band so we dressed kinda crazy and The House of Blues in Chicago was one of the coolest places to play,

we played there many times, and you can kinda go through all the dressing rooms they're all connected but I think someone asked if we wanted to meet Gavin and we were like shit yea. So we walked in the room and there was just a cloud of marijuana smoke and it was just one of the funniest pics ever, me, him, and Steve my husband. That was such a great show. And again he was very small! Like tiny. So that was always surprising.

**GSC:** In a post COVID world what is your dream line up for the album release show?

**TAMAR:** I would play with Matt Walker on drums 100%. I also really like the way Matt Thompson plays bass, he'd be fun. I also have Ron Silva who I practiced with here, he'd be fun to play with too. I'm cool with Chris playing, I am really loyal, I wouldn't go crazy I don't think.

**GSC:** Who would you have opening up for you?

**TAMAR:** Opening up, I love that framing! Oh God.... Maybe my daughter's band.

**GSC:** Love that!

**TAMAR:** Yea The Fluorescents. They're kicking ass. Really great, four girls all in high school kicking ass.

**GSC:** Love that. And do you have a dream venue?

**TAMAR:** The Metro in Chicago. In Portland there were so many great places but a lot of them closed down. Even before COVID these investors came and bought the land and shut them down. Man I have favorite places there but they're gone.

**GSC:** One last question for you, we close out all our interviews with this, what has been keeping you sane? Any movie, book, podcast, all entertainment that's kept you trucking through quarantine?

**TAMAR:** Podcasts would be The Hidden Brain and Criminal. I don't know why but I like mind stuff and The Hidden Brain is awesome for that. Criminal is fascinating stories about real criminals and I get really sucked up into that. I would say moving this album forward was a big thing. It was so monumental and I spent all of last summer in the studio, so that kept me sane. I would say thankfully the weather here in San Diego and having a porch outside has helped. The weather is really nice and I don't have to feel like I need to stay in. Other music, I've always really dug Lana Del Rey that was a really beautiful record she put out. I like The Wallows a lot, me and my daughter really listen to them a lot, great band. I am kinda a classic rock girl so I have this new stereo console and we just put old vinyl on and dude that is my life right now. Just putting on like Bad Company and ELO and Alice Cooper. I also feel so grounded being outside and I feel so fortunate to have a backyard to hang in but I don't like to say that because I know everyone doesn't have access. But yea that and the album. I don't know what I would have done without the album. It gave me a focus where I could see the light. I was almost thankful because I was forced to stay in and work on it, like I couldn't hit the beach. I feel like a lot of bands were like that.

**GSC:** Definitely, I just interviewed this band in Florida named Camp Trash who just put out a great record and they said the same thing, the thing that kept them the most sane was recording their album and listening to friends demos.

**TAMAR:** Music was everything last year for me. And the emotional journey I took recording this album, I can't really describe it. I surprised myself with how emotional this was, and I was really thankful my family was here with me, though I am sure I drove them bananas, I drive myself bananas, but I would have to agree with Camp Trash.

**GSC:** Do you feel motivated to get to LP 2 now? Do you already have new songs you're meditating on?

**TAMAR:** It's funny, I was just thinking the other day I already have some ideas in mind and I need to take the time and see how the demo comes out. Probably good to start doing that now because I don't know when touring opens up I might not have Matt Walker again. I think I'd like to but I don't know what it'd be so I need to listen to how people are responding to this record and ruminate on it and maybe I'll know. The well certainly isn't empty, I still have things I want to write about.

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