

MUSIC

Before Alanis Morissette and Tori Amos and a host of other no-pain-no-gain song sirens, there was Tamaras.

Born in Los Angeles 30-odd years ago, this talented singer/songwriter was raised by hippie parents, and one might guess at some of her influences—Janis Joplin and Jefferson Airplane with some Pete Seeger and David Bowie thrown in for good measure. Add a little Heart and Melissa Etheridge, and you might begin to sense where this petite musical powerhouse gets her drama, drive and, last but not least, plain old-fashioned charisma.

Tamaras' musical ideals hearken back to that '70s childhood. "I've got this voice that could reach hundreds and thousands of people," she says. "That's why there's a lot of story-telling and war protests, which is what we should be doing now."

One thing is certain: To meet Tamaras, the woman and musician, is to know her, and to listen to her perform is to hear her heartbeat. And the girl's heart pounds to the beat of a different drummer.

Over pints at the Egyptian Club, Tamaras reveals how she eschewed her love-child rearing and joined the Army at 17 (lying about her age). After boot camp she was a communications techie—the one responsible for making certain that when an officer yelled, "Fire!" into the headset, the soldier down the line wielding the cannon had the muzzle pointed in the right direction.

Today, it's Tamaras' music that yells "Fire!" In "Subside" she sings, "Know you can choose your life/And all this complication will subside/And I'll meet you there in the light/We'll breathe clean air under new skies."

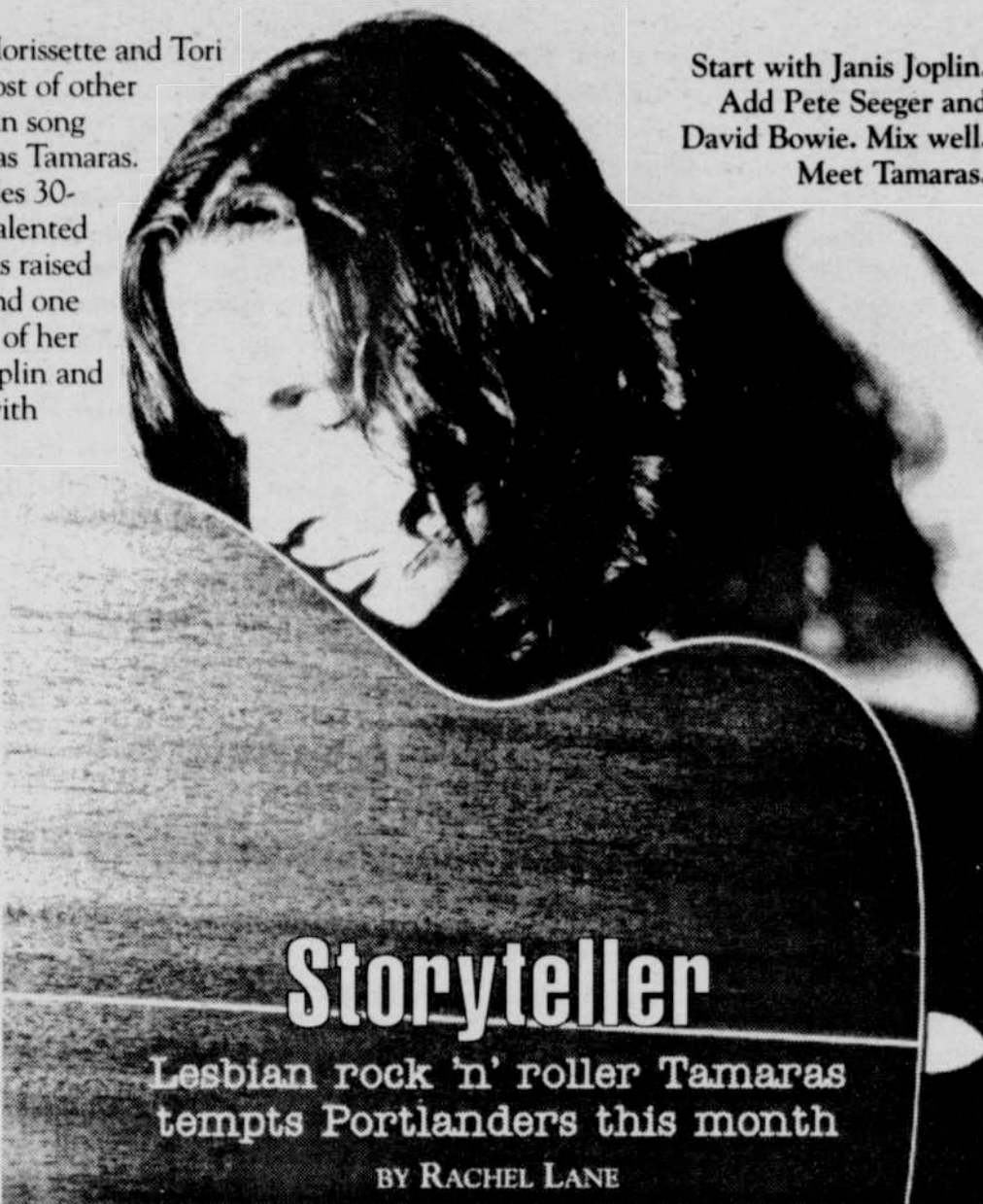
When Cpl. Tamaras wasn't rigging communications lines, she was practicing guitar and walking the "don't ask, don't tell" tightrope. Perhaps this was when the youthful siren began to envision lyrics like, "If everything was safe/Then what would make us brave?"

Something very clear emerges about the rock 'n' roll Tamaras before we've drained our second brew. Here is an artist in whom there is no guile. What you see is what you get.

And what do you see? A small, dark-haired woman with the hope of a teen-ager in her eyes—but not from a lack of worldly experience. Rather, from the admirable quality of character to tread through life's shallows and narrows and retain a kind of youthful exuberance—a tough and infectious idealism equally feared and admired. Who but a musician with the true heart of a traveling troubadour could feel equally at home playing for rustic audiences in southern Oregon bars, yuppies at Starbucks and sisters at the Egyptian?

One secret to the appeal is her superlative musicianship; she's a whiz on the guitar. Add to this a brassy, bluesy voice that can belt with the best of them but also possesses a soft side that can be heard in songs such as "Dust Bowl"

Start with Janis Joplin.
Add Pete Seeger and
David Bowie. Mix well.
Meet Tamaras.



Storyteller

Lesbian rock 'n' roller Tamaras tempts Portlanders this month

BY RACHEL LANE

from her latest CD, *Simple Is So Hard*. In it Tamaras deftly traverses the issues of how human desire and living nature are intimately entwined:

*Before the river disappeared
And all the beautiful trees systematically cleared
Yellow mustard hills would endlessly wind
Us through the open lands to the grapevine.
But now this dust bowl blows the stench miles across*

From the cattle rancher's money-making holocaust.

At home in Hollywood, Calif., Tamaras often performs with members of her three-piece band. In her last Saturday night concert at the Egyptian, it was all about her, though—an acoustic guitar and a voice that is at once hard and soft, hidden and revealing. Add to this her contagious smile, the kind of glad expression that says, "Here I am, doing the only thing I want to do, giving you all that I've got."

Listeners new to the music are well advised to listen both to her solo acoustic and to her band-accompanied work. While the self-same thread of rock 'n' roll runs through each, they each possess unique qualities all their own.

One critic characterizes Tamaras' ensemble work as "hard rock psychedelic." Another calls it "frenetic punk to melodic rock and even folk rock."

Mostly, though, she's a performer with the admirable ability to match her venues with just the right style. At coffeehouses and cafes, she is immediate and personable; on stage before large audiences, she ups the intensity and matches the potency of her electronics with equally powerful vocal and instrumental drama.

In a world often driven by hype and illusion, the title of Tamaras' latest recording is apropos. But don't expect simplicity from this woman's songs or performances. Her lyrics tackle issues both simple and complex, and her musical styles are varied and accomplished. **J**

TAMARAS plays the Ash Street Saloon, 225 S.W. Ash St., at 9 p.m. Aug. 7. Admission is \$6. She plays a free concert 7 p.m. Aug. 18 at the Egyptian Club, 3701 S.E. Division St. Visit the singer at www.tamarasrocks.com.



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