

Sophie B. Hawkins, who first gained national attention in 1992 with her Top 5 hit "Damn I Wish I Was Your Lover," is embarking on a new tour that has her dropping in to headline Portland Pride 2003.

During a lovely phone interview, the singer says she's looking forward to the Portland gig and that she has even thought about moving to the Rose City. "I've found a lot of spirit and energy in Portland," she says. "It is actually very healing. That's how I remember feeling every time—very, very healed."

Hawkins has played Pride festivals before but admits she hasn't played enough of them. She identifies as "omnisexual," saying the term fits her because she is always growing and changing. "I don't fall in love with someone's gender. I fall in love with their soul. I know that the meaningful connection is the soulful connection, and that's where the intimacy is."

She won't even discuss whether her life partner is female or male. "I would never say I'm a heterosexual. I would not mind saying I'm lesbian, but it wouldn't be accurate. It's not inclusive enough for me."

The native New Yorker splits her time between the Big Apple and Venice, Calif. She likes Venice because she can walk everywhere and be outdoors with her animals, and it reminds her of an East Coast town. "I've really thrived here—creatively as a musician, and also my mind has opened up a lot."

Hawkins says much of her personal growth has come from not being able to connect well with people in California. "I don't really understand a lot of the mind-sets, so I tend to be very alone. It's like being in the desert alone for me, and that's been a really good spiritual sojourn."

Hawkins' musical journey started at age 14 when she began studying African drumming. Her parents didn't understand her love of music or recognize her talent. She ended up moving out of the house.

"It was good, and it was also sad in many ways," she says. "I had to cut off really early from my family in order to pursue music."

She played the drums in various New York City bands, but what she really wanted to do was write songs, so she taught herself the piano and started writing, compiling a 50-song demo tape at a friend's studio. Later, while working as a coat check girl, she got the demo in the hands of the right person and ended up signing with Columbia Records.

Her debut album, *Tongues and Tails*, featuring "Damn I Wish I Was Your Lover," went gold, earning the self-made musician a Grammy nomination for Best New Artist. The 1994 sophomore release, *Whaler*, also went gold, and

## Declaration of independence

Sophie B. Hawkins' rocky road to gold

BY JAMIE BOLYARD



She can lay me down anytime—Sophie B. Hawkins plays Portland Pride 2003

the track "As I Lay Me Down" became one of the longest-running singles in the history of any *Billboard* chart.

In 1999 Hawkins' third album, *Timbre*, was released, although not without a fight. She had recorded the proposed single "Lose Your Way" on the banjo, but Columbia wanted to remix the song using guitars. Hawkins stood firm. Columbia halted the release. Artist and label were at a standstill.

While making a promotional appearance at a Tampa, Fla., radio station, Hawkins talked about the problem. They played "Lose Your Way," and fans began requesting the song and e-mailing her their support. Hawkins received thousands of e-mails that she was able to

present to record execs. The banjo stayed, and the album was finally released, marking the end of the singer's relationship with Columbia.

"I saw the times changing, and I left," she says. "I left...I didn't get dropped. I didn't have to sue...I walked away very cleanly.... I got my independence without having to be torn apart."

A year later she started her own label, Trumpet Swan Records, with Gigi Gaston, who directed *The Cream Will Rise*, a Hawkins documentary. The label rereleased *Timbre* in conjunction with Rykodisc. "Finding Gigi in my life as a business partner was so important to my making the transition from someone who was bound to be swallowed up by the system. It was definitely going in that direction."

Doing what is right for her has often left Hawkins without much of a support system. "Every time a woman steps up and does something positive for herself, there will be so many people trying to tear her apart," she asserts.

For instance, after a decade-long music career and two gold records, her parents still think she's joking. "I think they're ashamed of me, to be honest with you. I don't think they appreciate me, and I think that's why it's hard to appreciate myself...one of my big battles is believing in myself. I think a lot of us have that. If [we] don't get that right support, we spend our whole lives believing that we don't deserve it. That's why Gigi was so important when she believed in me."

The relationship is mutually beneficial—Hawkins gives Gaston the gift of her sincere love for music, noting her business partner "learned about managing from someone who really loves what they do. I'm not a diva. I absolutely love writing music. I love playing it. I love the entrepreneurial side of it. I like getting out there and seeing how far I can go. It was really good for her to learn the music business through me because when she started to see it through other people, she got very depressed."

With a new album ready to go, Hawkins is in the process of deciding the best way to release it—either independently on Trumpet Swan or in conjunction with another label like with *Timbre*. She says a decision like that depends on how courageous you are. "If you can be totally brave and totally energetic, you can get out there with not that much money and really build and build and build."

Hawkins says the as-yet-untitled fourth album, due out early next year, is soulful and full of joy. "I came through a lot of darkness on the album *Timbre*. Then I came to a tremendous amount of self-appreciation and appreciation of everything around me, and it really shows in the new record."

Hawkins has been rehearsing constantly with the two other musicians she'll be taking on the road, preferring to play with a smaller band. "It's actually very powerful," she says. "I've spent the last three years touring with this size band, and the feedback has been so much better than I've ever had. It's really raw. Wait 'til you see it!"

SOPHIE B. HAWKINS (and company) headlines Portland Pride 2003 at 4:30 p.m. June 15 on the Unity Stage.

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