

# Rays of gender

Amy Ray tackles the tough stuff

BY KATHY BELGE

Indigo Girl Amy Ray's second solo album, *Prom*, is a listening journey back to high school. The 41-year-old spoke with *Just Out* in advance of her three upcoming Oregon appearances.

**Kathy Belge:** Why is this album so much more gay than any of your Indigo Girls stuff?



Amy Ray sings about gender expression on her second solo album, *Prom*.

**Amy Ray:** I don't know. [Laughs] I think because in the context of punk and rock, the lyrics seem to get a little edgier, more graphic and political. When I have the singular focus I think it's easier to talk about something really intimate, like your own sexual identity, your own gender and how you relate to that. It's harder to do as a duo.

**KB:** There's a lot of reference to gender on *Prom*. What are you trying to get across about gender?

**AR:** When I say gender, like "We're a new gender nation" ["Put It Out for

Good"], I'm speaking from a generation of people younger than myself, because they have been the ones to articulate it the most. It's that idea that we're not contained into one gender anymore. We understand gender fluidity. We're looking at it in a new way, and we're going to challenge you at every turn. When I talk about male and female, I'm speaking to sexism and misogyny. It's all over the map. But I think that's the way gender is.

**KB:** Were you trying to reach out more to a gay male audience with your song "Rural Faggot"?

**AR:** Not on purpose. It came from a relationship that I had over the years with a few of the boys in my neighborhood, some of whom turned out to be gay. And I watched them grow up in the last 12 years. I watched them go through puberty and go through their different levels of gay-bashing with me.

**KB:** Were they bashing you?

**AR:** They would tell me off-color gay jokes to see how I would respond. Or this one kid... would be telling me how him and his friends would go down to Atlanta and make fun of gay people. And I was like: "Why are you telling me these stories? I'm gay!" And he said: "Yeah, but you're different. I know you." The song came out of that. **JM**

Catch AMY RAY with punk rock band Family Outing 8 p.m. May 8 at Crystal Ballroom, 1332 W. Burnside St. Tickets are \$15 at the door or \$12 in advance from the box office or Ticketmaster.

The INDIGO GIRLS will perform 6 p.m. July 15 at the Secret House Vineyard, 88324 Vineyard Lane in Veneta (\$33 from Ticketmaster), and 7 p.m. July 17 at the Oregon Zoo, 4001 S.W. Canyon Road (\$26 from TicketsWest).

"It should be a really amazing show. The talent is up there; no one's weak in anything," he says. "It'll be a unique experience for the audience."

Pendulum will perform *Crimson Cabaret* 8 p.m. May 13, 5 and 8:30 p.m. May 14 and 5 p.m. May 15 at the French American International School, 8500 N.W. Johnson St. Tickets are \$12-\$75 from TicketsWest.

—Rebecca Ragain

## Genre jumper

If you hear any of Tamaras' funky grooves or cutting lyrics spinning in your CD player, odds are she's on stage somewhere at that very moment, smothering audiences with her smoky vocals and charging words. Her songs translate just as well from festival stages to cozy jazz clubs to packed rock shows.

Tamaras wrote, sung, strummed guitar and produced all music on *Ordinary Supergirl*, her sixth album on her own label, Universal Love Music. However, she is largely influenced by the interactive touring experience.

"I love connecting with people all over the world," says Tamaras. "Don't get me wrong—touring is a backbreaking labor of love—but when someone approaches me

to play guitar by age 11.

"It's hard for people to label my sound because it encompasses many different genres," she says. "I have been compared to Ani DiFranco because of my socially aware lyrics and aggressive guitar style. My vocal style has been compared to everyone from Jeff Buckley to Janis Joplin. Some say I am a cross between Ani DiFranco and Radiohead."

Tamaras says others who have influenced her music are Fiona Apple, Curtis Mayfield, Nirvana, Erykah Badu, The Funk Brothers, Jeff Buckley and Etta James, to name just a few.

Political issues—primarily environmentalism, the war in Iraq and corporate greed—find themselves on the forefront of Tamaras' consciousness and seep into her lyrics.

"Life is political. My gender, my sexual orientation, what I purchase...every action affects something or someone, and therefore all is connected. Writing about the world around me is my responsibility and is necessary for my sanity," she says.

Tamaras has kept a nonstop touring



Tamaras performs May 16 to 18 in Portland.

schedule for the past five years, most recently returning from Japan.

"This was my third journey over to that great country. Each place is its own unique experience. Every city adds new color to my touring landscape," she says.

Tamaras encourages her fans to introduce themselves at her shows. She will perform 6 p.m. May 16 at Music Millennium, 801 N.W. 23rd Ave.; 9:30 p.m. May 17 at Ash Street Saloon, 225 S.W. Ash St.; and 7:30 p.m. May 18 at Suena, 3930 N.E. Hancock St.

—JRG **JM**



The all-trans Lipstick Conspiracy was named Girl Band of the Year by *The Bay Guardian*.

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