

music

Indigo Girl, Interrupted

Amy Ray goes solo

by Dale Schiff

When on hiatus from touring, promoting and making records with Indigo Girls, Amy Ray straps on her Les Paul guitar, assembles a group of musical friends and foundlings and makes solo albums. Her latest, *Didn't It Feel Kinder*, is a humanistic collection of personally charged political anthems.

"What ties the record together for me is the human yearning to be understood and the yearning to become empathetic with other people—how to love each other and be kind even when we're brutally angry," Ray says.

Fans of *Stag* and *Prom*, Ray's earlier solo albums, don't need to fret: *Kinder* still rocks, particularly on "Bus Bus" and "Who Sold the Gun," thanks to the verve and ferocity of longtime collaborators Melissa York (The Butchies) on drums and Portland's Kaia Wilson (The Butchies, Team Dresch) on guitar, providing both backbeat and backbone.

Kinder also has a spit-shine polish that sets it apart from the rough-and-tumble of *Stag* and *Prom*; this can be greatly attributed to Ray's decision to bring in an outside producer, Greg Griffith (Le Tigre, The Butchies), for the first time. She describes him as "a renaissance man of all things musical."

In making the album Ray says: "I wanted to use every voice I had inside me, every voice I had come across and absorbed. I didn't want to be limited by habit or insecurity or gender or place."

The result is a sweeter album that's more alternative country than punk and draws heavily from '60s and '70s influences. Its beauty is helped along by the ethereal background vocals of Seattle chanteuse Brandi Carlile, particularly evident on "Stand and Deliver," and the ragamuffin emo-meets-new-grass stylings of the band Arizona, which lends a hand on "Rabbit Foot" and "Out on the Farm."

There are moments on *Kinder*, like in the song "Let It Be Me," that Ray's telltale tenor is virtually unrecognizable as she sings in falsetto and bemoans, "It's hard to love the woman in me." It is a bit of musical sleight-of-hand; the songs have an infectious, sometimes irresistible early rock 'n' roll beat to them, but lyrically the subject matter is grave—war, fundamental religiosity, global warming. In the song "Who Sold the Gun," it's hard not to sing along with the catchy chorus—until you realize you're singing, "Gun, gun, who sold the gun" in reference to the Virginia Tech shootings and Iraq.

Ray is well known for being a grassroots activist

involved in multiple political and social causes—including gay rights, abortion rights, women's rights, low-power broadcasting, indigenous struggles, gun control, the Zapatista movement, environmental protection and the anti-death penalty movement—and this philosophy extends to her record label. An unlikely label mogul, Ray runs Daemon Records from an artist-centered perspective and is just as likely to be found filling orders as calling the shots. Daemon has been fundamental in helping some great queer bands get a leg up, including Athens Boys Choir and Girlyman. Lately it has been raising money to help people in the housing crisis feed and house their pets.

For fans who can't wait for the next Indigo Girls record, you don't have long to wait: In March comes *Poseidon and the Bitter Bug*, a two-disc collection with all the songs first recorded with a full band, then rerecorded "organic and stripped down"—just Ray and Emily Saliers on their guitars with a little banjo thrown in. And the duo are trying something new by self-releasing this set: After nine albums on Epic, Indigo Girls signed a five-record deal with Hollywood Records—until it dropped them in the middle of a



Amy Ray performs Feb. 2 in Eugene and Feb. 3 in Portland.

tour. With 40 years of combined musical experience between them, Saliers and Ray decided, rather than searching for a new label, to forgo the constraints of mainstream music making and add their name to the list of bands in the DIY movement. 10

AMY RAY performs with Arizona 7:30 p.m. Feb. 2 at Eugene's WOW Hall, 291 W. Eighth Ave. Tickets are \$18 at the door or \$15 in advance from TicketWeb. This lineup will be joined by Packer (Jenny Hoyston, Kaia Wilson, LKN) 8 p.m. Feb. 3 at Wonder Ballroom, 128 N.E. Russell St. Tickets are \$13 at the door or \$12 in advance from Ticketmaster.

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