

# How Much Have You Grown?

A Q&A with the Indigo Girls' Amy Ray

**W**hen my sister and brother started coming home from church camp in 1991 playing the first Indigo Girls album incessantly, I resisted. Then I gave in, after some discussion. Them: "Did you know they were *lesbians*?" Me: "Did you know they were *Christians*?" Equal amounts of disgust there, but we all kept on listening. Turns out that both Emily Saliers and Amy Ray kept on producing albums as well, sometimes together, sometimes solo. Ray has the stronger solo career, with her punk sound and her own record label, and both of them continue with various forms of activism, especially focusing on the environment, Native American rights and issues, LGBT youth and recovery from disasters like Katrina.

Ray, a generous interviewee (and now a self-described "Pagan for Jesus"), spoke with *EW* about her career, activism, the elections and the Indigo Girls finding themselves major-label free.

**You have a new album coming out this summer on Daemon Records, right?**

Yes, August 5. [*Didn't It Feel Kinder*] is a solo record. The Indigo Girls just finished one too, and it will come out in January or February. I think I like this album the best of all the ones I've done. Greg Griffith produced it. I'd never worked with a producer in solo projects. It challenged me and brought me up a notch. I had free rein to create cool stuff. With my solo stuff, I have a little baby solo career, and so I have to really like it; it has to be a labor of love.

**It seems like you and Emily have felt a responsibility to a variety of people and causes. Where do you think that urge comes from?**

I don't think we feel it as an obligation in a burdensome way. It was a thing we

were brought up with from our parents, where you engage with your community. With church and youth camps, we were learning this whole idea of what's happening around you and doing soup kitchens, homeless shelter work, AIDS work, environmental work. [As we became more successful,] we saw what we were doing as a tool to raise money and bring people together and take part in some community way. If we weren't playing music, we'd still be engaged in the activism world. At this point, activism gives us energy.

**For those who are perhaps new fans, could you talk about Honor the Earth ([www.honorearth.org](http://www.honorearth.org))?**

HTE is an organization that funds Native-led environmental action and also Native groups that do cultural sustainability. We raise money and give grants to existing groups that need money for gas to go to a blockade or for a recycling program in their community or doing something big like protesting uranium mines. We helped start it in the mid '90s with Winona LaDuke, and it has grown beyond me and Emily. We don't make decisions or sit on the board; we're the mouthpieces or the amplifiers, and we use our fan community to build support.

**Musicians are supposed to be ironic and cool, but being an activist means you have to be earnest. How do you reconcile those demands?**

I think you can be ironic and earnest, actually, at different times, but really, we

just can't reconcile it. [Emily and I] are never going to be cool because we don't care about that. What we care about is beyond who's cool and who's not, who's on the cover of *Spin*. When you're working with the Zapatistas, or you're in New Orleans doing a Hurricane Katrina



workshop, cool goes out the door. When you're looking at the people who have lost their houses and their culture, cool just goes out the window.

And we know that we're queer and these kind of unimaginable women who are what we are, and that's never going to go over well in a white straight male media. Ever. I struggle with it on a political level. Why is it so fucked up? Why does it have to be that way? I see younger friends who should have access, but they still don't. When you start talking about that versus activism, the activism part feels so much better than the other part of our career. It's fun, it's successful, it matters more than whether you're on the cover of some magazine or not.

**Can you believe you're signed to a label (Hollywood Records) that's**

**owned by Disney?**

No, we're not anymore because we got dropped. We're happy about it. It was a good moment for me. I felt like we were really not happy with that situation. We liked the people, but on a business level, they weren't doing a good job. What's going to change? Nothing. Mitchell Froom was still planning on doing our new record, and we recorded a record. It's mixed; it's ready to go, but we wanted to have some time to figure out a business plan. Obviously, we're going to stay independent and do it ourselves.

**Who are some musicians you're listening to right now?**

I have a band that I love that I worked with on my solo record: Arizona. These guys are awesome. They play this music that's like a combination of The Shins and The Who. They're super-smart and nerdy in the best way possible. They're coming out with a new record in the fall.

**What are your thoughts on November's election?**

Well, we have voter fraud, and we're run by something that has to do with corporations, but I still believe we affect the system, I really do, because I've worked on issues and won battles that shouldn't have been won if the system was completely in charge. I do believe we can affect change. I have a lot of hope;

I think Obama could win, and I think he can be a great leader, and I'm gonna be so relieved when George Bush gets out of that White House. Obama's this visionary; if something really bad happened, tons of voter

fraud and corruption and he wasn't able to win, I think people would rise up. He commands that kind of revolutionary spirit in people. Obama's got something about him that just makes people feel like they can win, and they're not going to accept anything else. **EW**

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