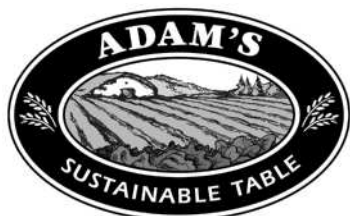


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Sailing the Hudson Back in Time

Eugenean Tracy Bonham plays solo acoustic

Make all the jokes you want these days about Courtney Love and Hole, but in 1996, Love actually held some cachet. Back then, **Tracy Bonham** was a 27-year-old classically trained musician who thought the whole screaming female thing was kind of funny. When she wrote the song "Mother Mother" (You remember: "I'm freezing / I'm starving / I'm bleeding to death / EVERYTHING'S FINE"), it was all in jest. "I hate to say it, but yeah, I was kind of making fun of things like Hole and Courtney Love," she says. "When I wrote it and started to perform it, I thought it was really goofy. Like, 'I can't believe I'm doing this.'"

But the song struck a chord, and it jetted to No. 1 on the rock charts. Bonham received two Grammy award nominations for that major label debut, *The Burdens of Being Upright*. "Some people got the joke, but how would you if you didn't know me? I came from a classical background and that was me reacting to my history," she says. "But if you didn't know me, you wouldn't know that, and you would take it seriously. I'm really grateful for where that song put me, but I really would like to shed that skin and move on."

If you've been paying attention to Bonham's career since *Burdens*, you know she already has. Bonham grew up in Eugene and still regularly visits her mother, stepfather and brothers here. Lately, though, the history of New York has inspired her, and the city comes to

life on *Masts of Manhatta*, her first full length album in five years. Bonham and her husband purchased a cottage in Woodstock, New York, where during the early 1900s people were creating little utopian communities to get away from the city. "That fascinated me," says Bonham. "I like to think about the boats going up the Hudson, and the trains, and people trying to get out of the city." The title is a nod to Walt Whitman's poem "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," written while he's on the ferry from Manhattan to Brooklyn, looking back at the buildings of lower Manhattan as if they were masts on a ship.

Since writing "Mother Mother," Bonham has grown — "I was a late bloomer in knowing how to communicate," she says — and her music shows a natural progression in sophistication and complexity. One track, "Your Night Is Wide Open," coils Bonham's singing around a classical guitar rhythm and cello, then morphs into steamy blues before finishing as gently as it started. "Devil's Got Your Boyfriend" boasts a sultry tango beat and juicy wordplay. Bonham nods to Eugene in "In the Moonlight": "Over the grapevine / Two Eugene girls spilling margaritas on the Shakespeare / Coming home summer feet on the dash / The future wide open before us."

Bonham is witty, pretty, impatient, blunt, sexy — not exactly mellow, but those angst-ridden days of her youth are gone, with a future before her as bright as the sun on the Hudson. **EW**

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