

Tori's own land of Oz



TORI Amos, the free-spirited entertainer, has a new muse in her life. The muse is 4½ years old — or “four going on 40” according to her mum — and her name is Natashya.

“We’re moving into another phase of independence,” says Amos, 41, “which is always wild when you’re in the middle of another country.”

Natashya asserted her independence at Sydney airport when she was asked to remove her shoes, as Amos delighted in telling her Brisbane audience this week.

Natashya is also aware her mum has a weird job.

“She just knows that when I go on stage that Tori Amos takes Mommy away from Tash. So Tori Amos is not very popular with Tash right now. But she also knows that Tori Amos buys her cool presents.”

Home for Natashya, Amos and her husband of seven years, sound engineer Mark Hawley, is Cornwall, England, where Amos writes and records. It’s then that the door closes.

“Creating music is a very kind of personal, private thing,” Amos says from the Brisbane Hilton hotel just hours before her show.

“It’s not something that I really do in front of anybody. It’s an internal process.”

It’s been more than 11 years since Amos last came to the Land of Oz, on the back of her successful second solo album *Under the Pink*. Since then she has been married, released seven albums, experienced miscarriages before Natashya’s birth, lived through the death of her brother, Michael, and talked about it all in a book, *Tori Amos: Piece by Piece*, released this year.

Amos is at once open and opaque. The warmth she directs to her grateful audience, thirsty after years of her absence, is palpable. She is aware of the paradox of taking something so personal as her music to an audience of millions.

“On one level it’s no big deal in that you don’t want — I don’t, anyway — to lock the songs away and throw away the key. Those out there might want to have a relationship with these creatures.”

Her latest album, *The Beekeeper*, was partly inspired by the Celtic beekeeping traditions of Cornwall. A honeycomb of songs, arranged thematically into “gar-

It’s taken Tori Amos 11 years but, as **SALLY BROWNE** reports, the singer-songwriter is delighted to be back in Australia

dens”, the album also explores her concept of “Original Sinsuality”, an alternative take on the Tree of Knowledge story.

On stage, Amos focuses on two instruments, the organ (which she considers male) and the piano (female). In a process of “cross-pollination”, she plays them simultaneously, behind her back, with a dexterity that only a former child prodigy — she won a piano scholarship at the age of five — with a healthy diet and exercise regime can manage.

Amos has also been inspired by the Nag Hammadi Gnostic gospels, discovered in 1945 and brought to a wide audience in Dan Brown’s *The Da Vinci Code*. She has said that along with Led Zeppelin and the Beatles, Mary Magdalene has been an influence.

“Of everything that I’ve been able to piece together it seems that she was one of the early prophets of Christianity, not a prostitute, but a prophet. It was just not profitable for the early church, who didn’t believe women should speak in church.”

Amos, the daughter of a Cherokee mother and Methodist minister father, is vocal on the “hijacking” of religion by the powers-that-be for political ends. Her song *The Power of Orange Knickers*, on which she duets with Irish singer Damien Rice, asks: “Who is this terrorist?”

The previous time she was in Australia, Amos says, she was “falling in love with Natashya’s dad.”

“I’ve never really been around children as an adult, so in a way children are new to me. Every day is sort of a whole ‘nother set of ‘Oh, wow!’

“And to see a country I haven’t been to for so long through her eyes, it’s something that I try to imprint, tattoo underneath my skin, so I can remember on her face, how she saw the sun rise.

“She thinks she’s in the land of Oz, like Dorothy and the red shoes. In her mind, it’s the Emerald City.”

Mum’s the word: Tori Amos

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Music notes with Ritchie Yorke



Underground lover

→ **BEN LEE**'s dream run sees the former member of **Noise Addict** rocking into The Tivoli in Brisbane's Fortitude Valley for a big show on Friday night. On the phone from Scottsdale, Arizona — where he was winding up a seven-week, 40-show North American tour — Ben sounded quite excited about his homecoming. “The tour’s sold out, my album (*Awake is the New Sleep*) was Top 10 and it’s like I’m doing a bit of a lap of honour or something. I feel like with this album, I’ve made some peace with Australia,” he said. *Awake is the New Sleep* has been his quickest selling album to date. Following the Oz tour, he’s back to the US to support emerging chanteuse **Aimee Mann** on her tour. Then to Europe, returning to North America to support **Ben Folds** and **Rufus Wainwright** on their northern hemisphere late-summer tour. There’s also talk of an appearance

on the **David Letterman** TV show after Oz. “In America, the underground is so big that you can survive just doing your music on an underground level, without crossing over to the mainstream,” Lee said.

Scalper warning

→ **THE Splendour** in the Grass festival in Byron Bay has sold out. Organisers are urging disappointed punters not to try to buy tickets through online auction sites as they are contemplating legal action against unauthorised sellers.

Radio days

→ **JOE Camilleri**'s **Bakelite Radio** are bringing their **Bakelite Radio Volume III** CD launch tour into southeast Queensland for shows at the Bribie Island RSL (May 27), The Edinburgh Castle Hotel at Kedron (May 28) and Joe's Watering Hole at Emumundi (May 29). Don't miss 'em.

Rising star

→ **EMERGING** singer-songwriter **Andrew Morris** is set to play a big show at The Zoo, in Fortitude Valley, with **The Gun Club**, **Love Hope and Charity** and **Texas Tea** on June 11. His *Little By Little* album was a recent Album of the Week at ABC Coast FM. He also went down well at the recent Cockatoo Island festival in Sydney.

Shaking it up

→ **THE** man who wrote and recorded the original version of **Hippy Hippy Shake**, **Chan Romero**, returns Down Under for a show at Seagulls, Tweed Heads, on June 8 to tie in with the wonderful Wintersun festival on the Gold Coast. Chan is rocking on at age 64, and is reported to be in fine form. His great song has been featured in many movies and was covered by **Normie Rowe** and by the **Swinging Blue Jeans**.