

TORI DIGS FOR GOLD

In her youth she was the fiery redhead with the terrifyingly frank lyrical material, but motherhood has changed Tori Amos, giving her a sense of humour and the ability to listen, writes Sally Browne

Classes at the prestigious Sylvia Young Talent School in London must be paying off for Tori Amos's daughter Tash, because apparently she does a good impression of mum.

The sassy 12-year-old is a budding singer and actor at the famous school where past pupils have included Amy Winehouse and Spice Girl Emma Bunton. Apparently, she's able to pick up on her talented and famously quirky mother's idiosyncrasies and play them right back at her.

"She does impressions of everyone," says Amos, 49. "This is the thing, if you meet Tash she will probably be doing an impression of you once you leave the room. But not in a mean way. She's funny."

But Tash's American mum can give as good as she gets, doing a humorous take on her daughter's clipped British accent on a recent interview on the Rosie O'Donnell show. Mum and daughter have a great relationship, and Tash can be seen in photographs accompanying Amos's last album *Night of Hunters*, which came out last year.

Now, Amos is releasing follow-up *Gold Dust*, a collection of some of her favourite songs from her career, re-recorded with the Dutch Metropole Orchestra.

It celebrates the 20th anniversary of her breakthrough record, *Little Earthquakes*, which defined her career as a singer-songwriter and built her a loyal fan base. For a singer, each record must be like a photo album of memories, but Amos says those memories are constantly changing.

While *Gold Dust* includes some of her famous hits, it also includes lesser-known numbers, and Amos says she chose songs she felt "close to" as well as songs that would best suit an orchestra.

"In a way, it's a living memory box but again the pictures I was creating with the orchestra were updating themselves constantly and I'm seeing new pictures when I was performing with them."

One of the songs is *Jackie's Strength*, from the 1998 album *The Choirgirl Hotel*. That song refers to Jackie Kennedy, whom she called on mentally and emotionally when considering whether she should marry her now-husband, British sound engineer Mark Hawley.

She wrote *Jackie* after deciding she would wed. "My husband proposed to me in a beautiful way. He said, 'I want to know what you're like when you're 80 walking down to the garden gate, will you marry me?'"

"After he proposed I was alone in Florida and contemplating what that was going to be like and all the questions that I'm sure women go through once that's happened.

"I started to think about being a little girl. I think as little girls you think about what marriage would be like. Who you will marry? I think that's natural.

"Your life can flash before your eyes at different times, when you're at a crossroads, where you're ready to make a huge change in your life and marriage is one of those moments. Giving birth, being pregnant, having a child, that's another moment."

The song that references her pregnancy is the title track, *Gold Dust*. Amos wrote it at a beach house in Florida, which

looks out over an ocean inlet and is close to a bird sanctuary. Amos says it is a magical place.

When not there, she and her husband spend time in his home county of Cornwall, England.

Amos met Hawley in 1994 and they married in 1998. It would probably take a certain kind of man to be a match for a strong character such as Tori Amos.

"Mark knows his own mind and isn't really seduced by the music industry," says Amos.

"He's worked in it since he was 18 as a sound engineer but I think being technical, he's in the business from a different side of things. He's not the type of person that wants the spotlight. So in a way, we're opposites.

"We never wanted to do each other's job. If you give me a computer, I'll just give it back and say, 'Where's your library?'"

But Amos's strength has often been in expressing her vulnerability. Does she feel like a strong woman?

"I would say to you that strength comes with being a good listener and I think in my 20s I wasn't the best listener and I didn't really have a sense of humour. My daughter has brought that out of me. I think being a mother is the greatest gift I've been given."

Amos grew up a wild and rebellious youth who knew her own mind, a fiery redhead who wasn't afraid to sing about personal experiences, even difficult ones, and cover topics as broad as religion, sexuality, femininity and feminism. A child prodigy who began composing her own melodies on piano at the age of five, she grew up under the loving, watchful eye of a minister father and academic mother.

She has reinvented herself in records that have covered subjects from the role of Mary Magdalene in the Gnostic Gospels in *The Beekeeper* (2005), to creating her own girl band of sorts for *American Doll Posse* (2007). For that record, she created five female archetypes, all of which she played herself, trotting out different ones on stage in a series of concerts around the world.

Her first signing to a record label came with her band Y Kant Tori Read – a 1980s synth-pop group in which Tori appeared as their highly hair-sprayed lead singer. The name of the band came from the fact that at music school, she apparently could not read music. The record was a flop. It was her follow-up album, *Little Earthquakes*, that launched her career.

"I wrote that coming out of a huge failure and so I had to claim who I was as a person," Amos says of *Little Earthquakes*.

"I stopped using hairspray, which was metaphorical in a way, because I needed to find my soul as an artist. I had it for many, many, many years and then I think I dabbled on a different path, as you do. I think I was fortunate that dabbling led to failure because then I claimed my soul totally and completely and never looked back. So *Little Earthquakes* was very much about claiming my soul."

Gold Dust is out now.

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