

# Cornflake GIRL



Grammy Award nominee Tori Amos enthralled audiences in November during the Australian leg of her *Unrepentant Geraldines* world tour, which followed extensive performances throughout Europe, South Africa and America. Eugene Yiga caught up with the talented singer-songwriter, pianist and composer, to discuss her youth, recent music and performing live.

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**You began playing piano at age two and performed in bars and clubs as an early teen. At what point in your life did you realise that you wanted to be a musician?**

I think it was just decided. It wasn't a conscious thought. When you're born and you're playing to express yourself, that's your first language. Music was my first language, so I couldn't imagine not having it in my life. My father [Rev. Dr. Edison McKinley Amos] ... wanted me to write music to glorify God in the church. I kind of thought ... we have different goals here. That was clear when I was about seven.

**What do you remember most from those early years?**

That you co-create with what I call "the muses" and that they speak to you if you listen. People who think that they do it by themselves usually have a very short career and aren't able to write for 50 years. Different composers and songwriters call it different things. [But] if you're able to tap in, you can hear different music structures. That's what true inspiration is: it comes from somewhere. Trust me. It does not come from me. It exists and anybody can tap into it. But you have to be willing to listen. And sometimes you've got to hunt for it. You have to be a hunter, but you have to hunt frequently.

**Fast-forward to today and you recently released your 14th studio album, *Unrepentant Geraldines*. What's the meaning behind the title?**

There are different meanings but where I was with [the album] was that you can't apologise for exploring and thinking things through. Sometimes I think people beat themselves up for thinking certain things. But, as an artist, you have to peel the onion – you have to go underneath a thought. Sometimes those thoughts can be disturbing but that's the only way you can get to ideas that hide from your day-to-day life and how you present yourself to people. Usually we're operating on an acquaintance basis and when someone asks how you're doing, they only really want to hear "fine". But if you're talking to me and I'm a songwriter, "fine" doesn't get me anywhere. So, when I'm writing songs, I have to ask myself "what are you really thinking?" I don't want to hear "fine" and you have to be unrepentant about that. And that goes back to being a hunter of ideas and thoughts.



**You've described *Unrepentant Geraldines* as different snapshots of your life and things you've observed. What specifically inspired you to write it?**

Over the past five years I was doing quite a few other projects that were highly collaborative: two projects with Deutsche Grammophon and one with the British National Theatre, which was [the musical] *The Light Princess*. During this time I was working with a lot of people who had different approaches to finding their creative answers, and I would observe that. It was very inspirational. But song-writing is a very lonely and introverted process. So these [*Unrepentant Geraldines*'] songs would be the things I would walk with privately. I've called them "secret sonic selfies".

**In terms of the sound of this album, it's more of a return to the contemporary**



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**music you started out with, as opposed to the classical ideas you've explored over the past few years. Why the change?**

I'm not a classical artist. That was a moment in time – a life-changing moment. I explored music I hadn't heard since I was a kid and some I hadn't been exposed to at all. But there's a lot of it out there. These other projects expanded my sonic palette. And that opened up my mind about structure and how structures were being combined, doing variations on the themes of the master composers ... When you crawl into somebody else's structure, that's how you learn, that's how you understand how structure can operate. Then, when you go back to your own work, hopefully you're able to apply new ways to create so you're not repeating yourself all the time. Sometimes people only make a few records because they're making the same record over and over and over again. You have to push yourself. You have to explore other structures in other genres in order to experience your vocabulary.

**Over the years you have explored some very personal issues in your music. What's the biggest message or feeling you want to communicate?**

Through stories I think you can explore emotions where people feel safe enough to crawl into those "sonic paintings". And then, when people feel safe and almost protected, they unmask themselves. It's a paradox but music can do that: make you feel safe enough to unzip your skin and then let the song take you on an emotional

ride. That's how the songs have been operating for me since I was little: they'd take me by the hand and they'd take me on this ride. I've explored all kinds of emotional worlds and I don't even have to leave my band chair!

**You toured Europe before coming out to Australia. How did you find that?**

It [was] a blast and electrifying for me. The audiences [in Europe] are fantastic and they're receptive. Of course I love playing with other musicians ... [But] when you play by yourself you end up in a living room with all these people. You're having a personal chat with a couple of thousand people through songs. It's very intimate. How it works best is when I change the show a bit every night, [because] completely different cultures [have] different energies. There are requests at the stage door that I try to work in. So the shows are very different because I'm playing to the people who are there.

**What do you do in your spare time while on tour?**

You've got to stay present and then plans show themselves. That's how the magic happens. You realise something's happening that day and you think "let's go see, let's take a walk and see what's happening here".

**What's next for you?**

We're doing *The Light Princess* album for Universal Records. We've done the orchestra and we'll be recording the actors. That'll be out [in 2015]. It's sort of like *Jesus Christ Superstar*. So that's my goal.

See [toriamos.com](http://toriamos.com) or [eugeneyiga.com](http://eugeneyiga.com).