

TORI AMOS: VOICE AND FEMINIST AGENCY

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Tori Amos performing at Royal Albert Hall 2014 Image: Gaëlle Beri

Source: <https://www.thelineofbestfit.com/photos/live-photo-gallery/tori-amos-at-londons-royal-albert-hall>

Introduction

I would like to begin this essay by referencing Neil Nehring's (1997:ix) acknowledgement, in the forward to *Popular Music, Gender and Postmodernism*, that it can be problematic for an 'SWM' (straight white male) to write about feminism. I fully accept that as an SWM living in a western patriarchal society, my experience of life is far more privileged on account of not just my gender, but also my ethnicity and sexuality than I may ever fully realise. However I have found Nehring's sensitivity to this matter gives a helpful pathway for *this* SWM to be able to consider Tori Amos from a feminist viewpoint. The majority of sources I shall be quoting have been written by women, however I am greatly encouraged by Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche's (2014) positive inclusion of men in her recent manifesto *We Should All Be Feminists*.

Across 15 studio albums and over 25 years of live performance, Tori Amos has powerfully given voice to feminist agency. Drawing on persona, myth, and her own experiences, Amos has crafted a songbook that highlights the tension between strength and vulnerability, power and submission, and the struggle of operating as a woman within patriarchal structures. Her highly expressive and virtuosic piano accompaniment is just as crucially a part of her 'voice' as her lyrics and singing. Within this essay I shall be exploring three aspects of Tori Amos's 'voice': her *autobiographical voice*, her *musical voice*, and her use of persona and characterisation, which I shall refer to as her *conceptual voice*. I aim to build a framework for understanding the public voice within feminism, evidencing why Amos's work as a whole can be viewed as feminist, and will go on to explore the use of her voice as a feminist strategy (Probyn, 1993), analysing individual songs, album concepts, piano and performance style and Amos's social activism. Although she has been known to problematise the term feminism (O'Brien, 2001), I wish to argue that Tori Amos effectively uses her voice as a feminist strategy. I am grateful to musicologist Lori Burns, and composer Hannah Kendall for their correspondence and input into this discussion.

The Public Female Voice

To begin with I shall consider the role of the female voice in our patriarchal society,

highlighting the feminist struggle to be heard. In *Women and Power: A Manifesto*, Classist Mary Beard (2017:3-4) begins her examination of the public voice of women by quoting an extract from Homer's *Odyssey*, (in which Odysseus's outspoken son, Telemachus, publicly silences his mother Penelope), demonstrating that women have been struggling to be heard for at least 3000 years:

I want to start very near the beginning of the tradition of western literature, and its first recorded example of a man telling a woman to 'shut up'... 'Mother,' [Telemachus] says, 'go back up into your quarters, and take up your own work, the loom and the distaff... speech will be the business of men, all men, and for me most of all; for mine is the power in this household.' And off she goes, back upstairs... [demonstrating] that right where written evidence for Western culture starts, women's voices are not being heard in the public sphere.

Beard (2017:19) argues that our cultural bias towards the male public voice is deeply rooted: 'we find repeated stress throughout ancient literature on the authority of the deep male voice in contrast to the female. As one ancient scientific treatise explicitly put it, a low-pitched voice indicated manly courage, a high-pitched voice female cowardice.'

Female Voices in the Music Industry

The struggle for a woman's voice to be heard in our society is perhaps at its most intense when that voice is youthful. In the very public sphere of popular music, it is common for young female voices to be heard fulfilling the role of wilful submission to male fantasies of sexuality; [for example see Die Antwood's 'I Fink U Freaky']. While the music industry seeks to present such examples as celebrating 'female empowerment' it is worth questioning whether this 'power' is illusory and subject to patriarchal control. These issues, as well as questions surround sexism and ageism within the music industry, are explored more fully within Sheila Whitley's (1997) *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender*. Performers who deliberately choose to use a youthful female voice as a positive strategy often meet resistance. Lucy O'Brien (2016:3) notes: 'while 'voice' is frequently used as a metonym for agency, the specific sonic character of the young female voice is routinely denied authority. White, adult singer-songwriters such as Kate Bush, Tori Amos,

and Joanna Newsom have deliberately and provocatively made use of high-pitched, girlish vocal timbres to depict the fey ingénue as uncanny, even unruly, and their approaches to singing have been criticised as shrill and unpleasant.'

In terms of examining the industry as a whole, I would tend to agree with Alex Macpherson (2013): 'The music business is a capitalist patriarchy'. Thus it can be problematic to consider Tori Amos alongside notions of authenticity and feminist subversion while operating within such a system. Nehring (1997) highlights the competing struggle between art and commerce. Lawrence Grossberg (1993) goes further, asserting the 'near impossibility of subversion through music' (Burns and LaFrance, 2000:15). 'In the end, rock, like everything else is a business. The result is that style is celebrated over authenticity, or rather, that authenticity is seen as just another style' (Grossberg, 1993:234). The music industry's assimilation of authenticity is documented in Fred Goodman's (1998) excellent *Mansion on the Hill: Dylan, Young, Geffen, Springsteen, and the Head-on Collision of Rock and Commerce*.

Grossberg's (1993) wholesale dismissal of authenticity within music on the grounds of commerce, is challenged by Alan Moore's (2002) 'Authenticity as authentication'. One of Moore's central arguments is that authenticity is ascribed rather than inherent in a work. Within this framework the audience plays a crucial role. Mélisse LaFrance (Burns and LaFrance, 2002) adds further weight to Moore's argument, with specific reference to Amos's feminist subversion, by adopting a reader-response approach (See Freund, 1987). In summary, the reader-response school places the 'reader' at the centre (at the expense of the work of art), arguing that all perception is a work of interpretation. Viewing the subject and object as invisibly bound 'ultimately leads to the view of *reading as writing*, as textuality.' (Burns and LaFrance, 2000:26). Applied to the music industry, it is possible to consider the impact music *actually* has on its listener, rather than the impact that a major label may *desire* it to have. As such, and despite the obstacles, it is possible for someone like Tori Amos to deliver feminist subversion within a capitalist patriarchy.

Despite the systemic inequality inherent in the music industry (see Jones, 2018 and Ingham, 2018), there have been many examples of female voices that have made

powerful feminist statements throughout the last 50 years. In *Women and Popular Music: Sexuality, Identity and Subjectivity*, Whitely (2000) charts the progression of 2nd and 3rd wave feminism from the 1960s to the 1990s highlighting a number significant female artists and songwriters whose voices spoke into and shaped the evolution of feminist discourse along the way. Of the 1990s Whitely (2000:196) notes:

Musically the period is discursively constructed by two distinguishing practices... through which (women) artists 'speak' or represent themselves. The first, relates to folk (and the singer songwriter tradition) in its emphasis on authenticity, 'truthfulness' to personal experience, and community; the second is concerned with artifice and is largely governed by the imperatives of commercial success.

Amos's Autobiographical (non-confessional) Voice

Tori Amos emerged in 1992 as a strong example of this first kind of female artist. At a time when Riot Grrrls were channeling feminist anger through distorted guitars, Amos turned to the piano to communicate a mix of defiance and doubt through a collection of intricate and highly expressive songs. *Little Earthquakes* was a fiercely brave debut album that saw her wrestling with desires to express feminist agency and sexuality, and experiences of operating within the patriarchal system of a religious upbringing. The opening line of the album (taken from the song 'Crucify') sets the tone: 'every finger in the room is pointing at me, I wanna spit in their faces then I get afraid of what that could bring'. *Little Earthquakes* was a breakthrough commercial success peaking at number 14 on the UK charts and paved the way for other female artists to follow.

Arguably, Tori Amos is one of the reasons why such artists as Alanis Morissette, Fiona Apple and Natalie Imbruglia have subsequently achieved popular appeal in the late 1990s. Certainly, few had sung about the personal turmoil inherent in both sexual desire and sexual assault prior to *Little Earthquakes* – let alone on the same album. As such Amos can be considered an ally of such pioneering contemporaries as Courtney Love, Björk, Polly (P.J.) Harvey, and riot grrrl bands Huggy Bear and Bikini Kill, all of whom challenged the extreme frontiers of gender and sexuality in the early 1990s. (Whitely, 2000:12)

A key element to many of the songs on *Little Earthquakes* is their autobiographical nature. While there is an important argument to be made for the author's own pathos in processing traumatic experiences through song (see Frith, 2001:101), it is clear that, in Amos's case, the impact goes further. Cultural studies author Elspeth Probyn (1993:105), quoting Laurence Grossberg, addresses autobiographical writing from a feminist stance: 'the autobiographical voice is often understood as the individual's search for identity rather than a critical strategy in cultural interpretation.' Too often have first hand female accounts of the oppressive experiences of living in patriarchal systems been limited to just addressing the author's personal experiences, rather than being allowed to speak into structural issues surrounding female experience within patriarchy, or even the human condition itself. As Beard (2017) has demonstrated, so often has the female voice been silenced by men, that the very act of *speaking* can be a strong example of feminist resistance. Probyn (1993:120) offers this rousing summary:

A feminist cultural studies approach to the autobiographical reveals the voice as strategy. ...these personal voices *can* be articulated as strategies, as ways of going on theorising. And as such, they (and we) need to be heard.

Whitely (2000:196) supports Probyn's view being applied to Tori Amos, observing that her songs 'provide specific insights into the relationship between subjective experience and the meaning of women's lived reality.'

In Lori Burns and Méllisse LaFrance's *Disruptive Divas* (2002), LaFrance references Probyn, not only asserting Amos's use of the autobiographical voice as a strategy '[articulating] allegedly private and largely silent (and indeed silenced) gynocentered traumas.' (Burns and LaFrance, 2002:3), but also challenging the way her 'voice' has often been mislabelled by press and academics alike. This becomes clear when the language used to describe such songwriting is scrutinised. Chris McDonald's (2016:238) largely well argued essay, 'Tori Amos as Shaman', introduces Amos as 'a prototypical *confessional* singer- songwriter' (emphasis added); a view shared by Simon Reynolds and Joy Press's (1995) discussion of Tori Amos within their essay 'Open Your Heart: Confession and Catharsis from Janis Joplin to Courtney Love'. McDonald (2016) cites,

among other songs, 'Me and a Gun': an a cappella account Amos being raped by a fan when she was 21, as a strong example of her confessional writing. Reynolds and Press (1995:267) describe this song as 'her ultimate confessional'. While on the surface 'confessional' may seem an apt description, LaFrance (Burns and LaFrance 2002:64-65) forcefully argues against Amos being assigned this label from a feminist standpoint and challenges the notion of autobiographical writing being termed both 'personal' and 'confessional':

First, the tendency to view her music as self therapy that '[confronts] some difficult *personal* subjects' (Demain 1994:1, emphasis added) is symptomatic of male supremacist readings that refuse to link the oppressions of one woman with the more widespread and profoundly systemic oppression of all women... Second, I reject the application of a 'confessional' musical categorisation to this singer-songwriter. This organising category is problematic due to its inevitable association with guilt, apology, and sin. It is also problematic as it appears to be reserved primarily for female artists... I also contend that there is no causal nexus between attempting to find one's voice, using that voice to articulate many of the traumas that remain silenced, and 'confessing.' Reynolds and Press (1995) [and McDonald (2016)] have conflated Amos's attempt to unsilence the traumas that have shaped her with the act of confession, a conflation that effaces the courageous assertion of female subjectivity and replaces it with a female guilt leitmotif.

I agree with LaFrance's assertion that it is problematic in this instance to refer to Amos's 'Me and a Gun' as confessional, because it reinforces notions of women's complicity in sexual assault and victim blaming. McDonald (2016: 243) later uses the term to describe the song 'Spark' as 'another example of a deeply personal confession of trauma, in this case Amos' miscarriage'. It is erroneous in the extreme of McDonald to be casually associating guilt with the tragic experience of miscarriage where the subject is categorically devoid of culpability (see Hale, 2007). Amos herself has rejected the label 'confessional': "When male poets talk about emotions, bare to the bone, then they're just being 'deep and poetic' - it's the women who carry the pejorative. 'Confessional' just sounds like a dumping ground to me, and meaning you have something to get off your

chest instead of an active choice and the precision.” (Blanche, 2012). It is worth noting that Amos sees this mislabelling as a feminist issue, stating that the term is more often associated with material written by women rather than men. This view is supported by a number of other prominent female songwriters cited by Alexandra Pollard (2015) in her article *Why are only women described as ‘confessional’ songwriters?* Given Amos’s own public rejection of the label ‘confessional’, alongside Lafrance’s strong rebuttal and assertion of the importance of the voice as feminist strategy, I believe it would have been far more appropriate for McDonald (2016) to have referred to the works in question as autobiographical rather than confessional.

Aside from his mislabeling McDonald (2016), supports Probyn and Lafrance’s view, arguing there is scope beyond the author’s experience to enable some listeners to experience healing by opening up about their own experiences. In a recent interview with NPR’s Talia Schlanger (2018), Amos told of how her (capitalist patriarchy) label initially didn’t want ‘Me and a Gun’ to appear on her debut album as it was “too hard to listen to”. Amos insisted on its inclusion despite it being a “hard listen”, as she felt that the song would go on to enable other women to tell of their own stories. Sure enough, nightly performances of ‘Me and a Gun’ led to Amos hearing of more and more accounts of audience members own experiences of sexual assault (The Place, 1997). In response, Amos co-founded the charity R.A.I.N.N. (Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network): a national toll free hotline and counselling service supporting victims of abuse (MTV, 1994). It is of note that Amos revealed that she had not spoken about her experience with anybody prior to writing ‘Me and a Gun’, making the song its own kind of “first call” (Schlanger, 2018). Adding further weight to her own conviction that it was of utmost importance to include the song on her album is the evidence that Amos’s experience of sexual assault is widely shared. To date R.A.I.N.N. has supported more than 2.5 million people and is currently receiving more calls than ever (Prince and Kinis, 2018). Alongside ‘Me and a Gun’ and founding R.A.I.N.N., songs such as ‘Spark’ and, ‘Silent All These Years’, which confronts a domestic abuser, are strong examples of Amos’s courageous autobiographical voice, evidencing why Tori Amos deserves to be celebrated as a forerunner of ‘Silence Breaking’ (Time, 2017) in the feminist movement.

Amos's Musical Voice

In song music plays just as significant role as words (see West, 2016 and Webb, 1998), so as well as discussing the *autobiographical voice* of Amos's lyrics, it is crucial to examine the *musical voice* of her piano playing. Musicologist Lori Burns (2000) lists 'Musical 'Voice' and dramatic function' as one of the categories that she considers in her analytical work. With this in mind, I would like to look at the way Amos's musical voice of her piano playing contributes to her feminist strategy. O'Brien (2011:205) observes that Amos 'brings out the inherent feminine sensuality of the instrument, playing the piano in a way that is raw, ultimate, and, at times, overtly sexual.' In live performance, Amos sits at the piano with legs wide apart, her gaze looking out towards the audience, inviting them to listen in on intimate conversations she holds with her piano.

In interview Amos professes to this unique relationship she has with the piano. In conversation with Ann Powers (Amos and Powers, 2011:115, 120, 122) Amos explains: "It's a mistake when critics focus on lyrics alone...singing, songwriting, and the piano are inseparable for me. I need to play the piano to be who I am... I married somebody who understands the relationship I have with the piano. That's key." In interview Amos has indicated that she thinks of her pianos as being female (a view commonly held in the 19th century). So convinced is she that the piano is an extension of her voice, that she gives this glowing endorsement: "All I knew was -- when I touched her -- that she became my friend. And it's not as if it were one piano, it's any Bösendorfer seems to have some kind of, understanding. They can speak, and they can listen. And I think, when you play them, you become an extension." (Bösendorfer, 2018) This complex relationship she neatly summarises: "I don't play the piano, the piano plays me." (Deevoy, 1994).

Amos bares a unique voice in her piano playing: a hybrid of classical and contemporary influences. As a five-year-old she received a scholarship to study at the prestigious Peabody Institute. There she was instructed in the classical repertoire, but at the same time gleaned left hand technique from listening to Stevie Wonder and Led Zeppelin's John Paul Jones. By the age of 11 Amos tells that her music reading had lagged behind her aural improvisation skills. Speaking of that time, Amos reports "It was sad to not be the

Girl Wonder anymore. But I started to spend time with the composers at school and began to see that this was a very different endeavour” (Amos and Powers, 2005:44). Band member Jon Evans offers some insight into how these formative experiences later manifested themselves in the harmonic and rhythmic construction of Amos’s arrangements: “Her voicings are very classical...not jazz. She begins with her voice; there are meters and bars thrown in that complement her vocal lines.” (ibid:113) Amos’s piano often adopts a voice like role, joining in unison with her melodic and rhythmic vocal lines. This kind of voice led meter is evident in moments such as the post chorus of ‘Cornflake Girl’. Here the piano ‘speaks’ with Amos the repeated verbal command: ‘Peel out the watch-word’. To accomplish this, the piano shifts from stating a steady rhythmic accompaniment to voicing an unconventional melodic meter. The shuffled swagger of the cut common time pulse is diminished to one bar of 3/4 at the start of the phrase, allowing her to ‘play’ with the length of the word ‘Peel’, the second time extending its duration from crotchet to minim. This repetition, combined with this very subtle difference in duration (also mimicked in the dotted crotchet augmentation of the phrase ‘watch-word’), gives each word a sense importance as if the piano *slowing for emphasis* contributing to this verbal command (see Appendix 1 for transcription). The extract shows how Amos’s piano part emulates and harmonises with her vocal melody in a single homophonic line, before the left hand triplet (a la Stevie Wonder’s ‘Higher Ground’) launches back into the driving piano riff.

The close interplay between the piano and voice, shifting constantly between polyphonic counterpoint and homophonic harmonisation, is very common throughout Amos’s repertoire, suggesting that the piano is considered a complementary constituent ‘voice’ within Amos’s sound. This is further evidenced in ‘Cloud On My Tongue’. A bare scalar repeating figure features a rising base note from the first inversion of the Eb tonic. This ascending line works its way through Ab and Bb before reaching the haunting Cb suggesting an inversion of Ab minor, before descending back to Eb with a G in the bass before beginning its journey once more. Amos sets this pattern to a single note vocal line on Eb that leaps to the fifth (Bb) before immediately returning to the tonic once more. The vocal line is harmonically bare, intentionally giving space for the more intricate piano’s

harmonic 'voice' to sing through. This polyphonic interplay immediately gives way to the homophonic syncopation of 'Leave the wood outside/Leave me with your Borneo' where both 'voices' combine to speak one harmonic line in unison (see appendix 2 for transcription).

As well as speaking in unison, there are other moments when Amos's piano 'voice' appears to be having a conversation with the lead vocal as if two characters are filling in different details together telling of the same story. 'Pretty Good Year' is one such example. Approaching a moment of drama Amos sings 'well let me tell you about America' drawing out the start of the word America with a major 2nd rhythmic quaver burst (Ab to Bb). This line is harmonised with consonant major thirds, however once Amos has sung the line, the piano moves into a foreboding minor second cycling between F and Gb. This seems quite out of place harmonically with all that has preceded it thus far, creating a moment of heightened tension. It is significant that Amos is here choosing for the piano to 'tell us all about America', as it is conveying more about her mood in two notes than she may have achieved in a whole verse (see appendix 3 for transcription).

This destabilising passage is just setting the scene for explosive drama later in the song: a sudden modulation to E minor, full band instrumentation and minor second vocal pleading 'what's it gonna take till my baby's alright?' (see appendix 4 for transcription). The minor second sees the vocal this time emulating the piano from earlier in the song. The piano itself mirrors the minor second vocal widening at the end of each phrase. This eruption is totally unexpected on first listen, however closer analysis shows that the listener has been prepared for this dramatic change of mood.

Amos effectively uses the piano to express her emotion and support what she is saying. Perhaps the most powerful example of this is the role the piano takes during 'Me and a Gun'. As an a cappella piece, the piano is notably absent. Its silence here is unnerving, significantly adding to the intensity of Amos's voice. Initially I interpreted the absent piano as being representative of Amos's voice being *silenced* during this sexual attack, however I am now fully convinced that the piano's voice is *silent* in respect; listening, giving and demanding full attention of Amos's courageous decision to tell her story; the piano refuses

to divert our attention with a single note. This (silent) musical voice makes a profound contribution to Amos's feminist strategy.

Amos's Conceptual Voice

As well as her *autobiographical voice* and *musical voice*, Amos has employed her *conceptual voice* across a number of albums as a feminist strategy. *Strange Little Girls* is a collection cover versions of songs written by male writers. This time, however, the songs have been voiced from the female perspective. Through personal interviews with Amos, Lucy O'Brien (2002:204) in *She Bop II: The Definitive History of Women in Rock, Pop and Soul*, describes this album's feminist journey in and how Amos 'has given women a voice for their anger'. Amos tells O'Brien (ibid:206) that in *Strange Little Girls* she was exploring "how men say things and what a woman hears. You take a man's Word, you take his seed. The word became flesh in the wound of the voice of the woman", adding "I call my songs girls and these were strange ones". In preparation for the album Amos interviewed a number of male listeners and it struck her that none of them ever made mention of the female perspective within the songs they were discussing. Perhaps the most unnerving song on the album is her take on Eminem's infamous '97' *Bonnie and Clyde*: a horror rap fantasy in which the rapper describes murdering his wife who is tied up in the boot of their car, while their daughter sits next to him on the front seat. Tori speaks of her compulsion to give this fictional mother a chance to be heard: "In 'Bonnie & Clyde,' that was Eminem -- or one of the many people living inside him -- and he killed his wife. She has to have a voice." (Hochman, 2001). "I wonder what she felt - no men I talked to asked that question. But the woman in the back room screamed "what about her?" (O'Brien, 2001:208). '97' *Bonnie and Clyde* is daring and confrontational songwriting. By inhabiting this character and unsilencing her voice, Amos is able to challenge Eminem's male fantasy violence with a voice that is as confrontational and unsettling as the original; but also far more convincing.

The use of persona and character enables Amos to go further in her feminist and political agency than perhaps her autobiographical voice would allow. This is again evident on her album *American Doll Posse*. Here Amos adopts five different personas ('Isabel', 'Clyde', 'Pip', 'Santa' and 'Tori' - see image below), linking each to a character from Greek

Mythology, and giving each a different name, personality and sound both vocally and instrumentally. Through these personas Amos gave voice to the feminist political anger she was feeling over the war in Iraq that was happening at the time, saying of the album "I'm looking at how America's patriarchy has betrayed the masses" (Haida, 2007). Promotional text for the album reads: 'After centuries of being dismembered, literally and figuratively, by the ruling patriarchy, the feminine essence has reassembled to take back the power.' (yessaid.com, 2018). The different personas each had their own blog hidden on the internet, with fans tasked with hunting the blog pages down. More than just a marketing device, these blogs highlighted Amos's commitment to the voice of each of these personas. This is also evident in the live tour for *American Doll Posse*. On the tour, each show was opened up by a different persona in full costume playing their songs from the album (before a second set from Tori covered the rest of her catalogue). These performances are documented on the *Legs and Boots* series of live concert recordings released hours after each show. Listening to *American Doll Posse* in sequence is varied and surprising, with Tori changing accent, lyrical content and genre throughout depending on which persona is performing (an experience reminiscent of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*). What is striking throughout is the strength of her feminist and political statements as demonstrated in song titles such as 'Yo George', 'Mr Bad Man', 'Girl Disappearing' and 'Fat Slut'.



The *American Doll Posse* Image source: <http://www.yessaid.com/photos-2007-americaandollposse.html>

Night of Hunters is a further exploration of feminist agency through Amos's conceptual voice. Commissioned by the Deutsche Grammophon label to create a song cycle based on classical works, *Night of Hunters* sees Amos drawing on the Irish mythic in a narrative work spanning from dusk until dawn. Describing the album in the official press release, Amos says "I have used the structure of a classical song cycle to tell an ongoing, modern story. The protagonist is a woman who finds herself in the dying embers of a relationship. In the course of one night she goes through an initiation of sorts that leads her to reinvent herself allowing the listener to follow her on a journey to explore complex musical and emotional subject matter." (Deutsche Grammophon, 2011). In interviews at the time of release, Amos references her own marriage as being part of the inspiration of the work, however here she chooses to use a mythic narrative rather than autobiographical approach. Not for the first time, Amos involves her daughter Natashya in the album. Natashya voices the part of Annabelle, a shape shifting creature who acts as a guide along the protagonist's journey. It is worth noting that not only has Amos given space for her daughter's youthful female voice to be heard (aged 11 at the time of release), the protagonist of the song cycle expresses a desire to listen to this young voice and a willingness to be led by it. This is yet another powerful expression of Amos's feminism and her valuing of the female voice regardless of its age.

It is also of note here that Amos is once more reinterpreting the work of men. The classical canon is dominated by the patriarchy, with very little room given for works by female composers. In a wildly dismissive article, Damien Thompson (2015) argues unconvincingly that this is because the work of female composers is historically *not as good* as their male counterparts, however this view merely betrays the authors own ignorance and privilege. It is of some significance that Amos's voice is reinterpreting works of Satie, Debussy, Chopin and others, however contemporary classical composer Hannah Kendall (2018) points out that it is common nowadays for women composers to be commissioned to create art songs, chamber music and vocal pieces, yet is rare for a woman to be commissioned to create a large scale symphonic work or opera. This provides further evidence that the struggle for the female voice to be heard within classical

music is very much ongoing. It is therefore not surprising to find Amos operating subversively here as well. *Night of the Hunters* provides Amos with an opportunity for her conceptual voice to once more express feminist agency.

Conclusion

In this essay I have chosen to use a wide understanding of the notion of what constitutes a 'voice', and I am interested in further exploring the application of 'voice' for other singer-songwriters. Although I have considered these three distinct aspects of Amos's voice separately, it is important to emphasise that each constituent part is working together simultaneously to form a coherent whole. Just as a song is the combination of words, music and structure (see West, 2016), so can we consider Amos's voice as being a combination of autobiographical, musical and conceptual. Amos's autobiographical voice must not be dismissed as being 'confessional'; her musical voice must acknowledge the importance she places on her relationship with the piano; and the significance of her conceptual voice must not be diminished.

Like her 'American Doll Posse', these three distinct aspects of her voice all interweave to make a clear statement of Amos's commitment to voicing feminist agency and subverting patriarchal oppression. I agree with Lori Burns's assertion that Amos 'remains a powerful feminist voice to this day' (Burns, 2018). In consideration of the ongoing struggle the female voice still has to be heard in public, it has been inspiring to discover how Tori Amos has consistently used her *autobiographical, musical and conceptual* voice as a feminist strategy.

I wish to conclude by returning to Nehring's (1997:ix) 'SWM' and Ngozi Adiche's (2014) *We should all be feminists*. Whilst the way Amos gives voice to female experiences is profoundly beneficial for women, it also offers new ways of thinking and being for men too, and this 'SWM' finds Tori Amos's voice to be instructive in my own endeavour to not recreate the oppressions of the patriarchy.

5,308 words.

Appendices:

Appendix 1 - Cornflake Girl

Peel out the watch-word just peel out the watch word _

L.H. L.H. 3

Appendix 2 - Cloud On My Tongue

Some-one's knock-in' on my

4

kit - chen door leave the_ wood out side what all the girls here are

8

freez - ing cold leave_ me_ with your_ Bor - ne - o

11

I don't need_ much to keep me warm and

Appendix 3 - Pretty Good Year - extract a)

Well let me tell you some-thing a-bout A - ne - na A -

cresc.

Detailed description: This block contains the first system of music for Appendix 3, extract a). It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line starts with a treble clef and a key signature of three flats (B-flat major/D minor). The tempo is 3/4, which changes to 4/4 in the second measure. The lyrics are "Well let me tell you some-thing a-bout A - ne - na A -". The piano accompaniment consists of chords in the right hand and a single note in the left hand. A *cresc.* (crescendo) marking is placed above the piano part.

me - ri - ca

f marcato

Detailed description: This block contains the second system of music for Appendix 3, extract a). The vocal line continues with the lyrics "me - ri - ca". The piano accompaniment features a more active bass line. A *f marcato* (forte marcato) marking is placed above the piano part. The system ends with a double bar line.

Appendix 4 - Pretty Good Year - extract b)

Hey _____ what's it gon-na take_____

Detailed description: This block contains the first system of music for Appendix 4, extract b). It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The tempo is 3/4. The vocal line starts with a treble clef and a key signature of three flats. The lyrics are "Hey _____ what's it gon-na take_____". The piano accompaniment consists of chords in the right hand and a single note in the left hand.

till my ba - by's al - right what's it gon - na

Detailed description: This block contains the second system of music for Appendix 4, extract b). The vocal line continues with the lyrics "till my ba - by's al - right what's it gon - na". The piano accompaniment continues with chords in the right hand and a single note in the left hand.

take_____ till my ba - by's al- right_____

Detailed description: This block contains the third system of music for Appendix 4, extract b). The vocal line continues with the lyrics "take_____ till my ba - by's al- right_____". The piano accompaniment continues with chords in the right hand and a single note in the left hand. The system ends with a double bar line.

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