

Sing Us a Song, Piano Woman: Female Fans and the Music of Tori Amos

Adrienne Trier-Bieniek



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Sing Us a Song, Piano Woman: Female Fans and the Music of Tori Amos Adrienne Trier-Bieniek In April of 2007, when Virginia Tech became the site of the worst school shooting in U.S. history, Adrienne Trier-Bieniek was a graduate student finishing a master's degree in the school's department of sociology. In the months that followed, Trier-Bieniek sought ways to deal with her heartache and sense of loss. As she had many times before, she turned to Tori Amos's music as a guide for healing, using the songs as channels for her grief. Amos's style of introspective songwriting often focuses on women's experiences. Among other themes, her songs frequently tackle encounters with grief and loss, as well as violence against women, miscarriage, the degradation of the earth and sexual liberation. Using this music to facilitate her own healing led Trier-Bieniek to consider how other women had used Tori Amos's music as a means to heal after trauma. Knowing that many women had turned to Amos's music after an assault, or to help them heal from things like eating disorders or the loss of a child, Trier-Bieniek began to research women's encounters with music in general and Amos's music in particular. This exploration led to a landslide of information regarding the ways women are represented in pop culture, particularly the gender stereotypes of female fans.

The result of this study is "Sing Us a Song, Piano Woman: Female Fans and the Music of Tori Amos." Released on June 16, 2013, this book explores the many-layered relationships female fans build with feminist musicians in general and with Tori Amos, in particular. Using original interview research with more than forty fans of Tori Amos, multiple observations at Amos's concerts and an analysis of Amos's lyrics, Adrienne Trier-Bieniek employs a combination of gender, emotions, music, and activism to unravel the typecasts plaguing female fans. Trier-Bieniek aggressively challenges the popular culture stereotypes that have painted all female fans as screaming, crying teenage girls who are unable to control themselves when a favorite (generally male) performer occupies the stage. In stunning contrast, admirers of Tori Amos tend to be more reflective. *Sing Us a Song, Piano Woman* examines the wide range of stories, exploring how Amos's female fans are unique because Amos places the experiences of women at the center of her songwriting and musical composition. The result? A legion of female fans whose experiences with assault, eating disorders, miscarriage and other traumas have left them hunting for music that will help them rebuild -- and in Tori Amos's songs, they find it.

At a time when superficial women dominate public media presentations, from the Kardashians to the "Real Housewives," the relationship between Tori Amos and her fans illustrates the continuous search by women for female performers who challenge patriarchal standards in popular culture. Trier-Bieniek's research shows that women want to see their identity reflected in the women who dominate pop culture. Academically, "Sing Us a Song, Piano Woman" will serve as a contribution to research aimed at gender, sociology, feminist methodology, pop culture, social psychology, emotions, culture, women's studies and health/healing.

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