



Guitar Goddess

She scored *Hate Crimes* and gets compared to Hendrix, but Ebony Tay still wants to step it up.

I met singer-songwriter Ebony Tay at a popular gay hot spot in West Hollywood and had a fabulous interview over a glass of red wine and mixed baby greens. Sadly, we both got food poisoning and puked the rest of the evening. Thankfully, I recorded the conversation. — *Jennifer Corday*

Tell me about your latest record.

I have a five-song EP out called *Stories of the Firehorse*, with profits going toward global warming [awareness], and I also have a live CD on the way.

But I'm still actively promoting the soundtrack for *Hate Crimes* as well.

Why were you interested in working on the film *Hate Crimes*?

It was about standing up against the fundamentalists who judge people. I'm all about nonjudging. Let's stop putting people in boxes.

So you wrote all the songs for the movie? It's really a very moving collection of songs.

Yes, I scored the whole movie and produced the soundtrack. All the money from CD sales goes toward AIDS and anti-violence [organizations].

Why are you so passionate about this cause? Has it affected you in some way?

My brother was gay and his partner, my brother-in-law, jumped 22 stories and committed suicide because his family wouldn't accept him, because he was gay. My brother has never been the same. They were together for 15 years.

I vowed that I would do something to try and make it right.

I'm sure you are making a difference. Is he your only brother?

There were 11 of us. I was adopted as a baby into a poor, white, country family. My mom had a hard time when my brother came out of the closet at first, but she eventually accepted it. She used to say that God just made the angels that way. So if my family—right-wing gold miners—can accept each other, why can't the rest of the world?

Do you hope to change the world with your music?

Absolutely. I believe musicians are also physicians. My dad used to call them "physicianeers." You can heal people with your guitar.

You are an extraordinary player—I saw you live at the San Diego Indie Fest and was really impressed with your skill. How'd you get so good?

I just took my first guitar lesson five months ago. And it helps to be single. I am dating my guitar. I have bumped up my playing another 10 notches since then.

Perhaps I should try that.

Women have to step up to the plate. We're still not being taken seriously at the executive level. My manager calls me "Hendrix in a dress" and "Janie Hendrix." But I'm not the first black woman to excel in music. Check out Sister Rosetta Tharp—they called her "Chuck Berry in a dress"—and Memphis Minnie, who did Elvis songs. They were extraordinary players, but they were black and they were women, so they got kicked into the churches. ■

Speaking for Herself

Brit electronica-pop sensation Imogen Heap can do it all and look damn good while doing it.

The first time I saw Imogen Heap, I was nearly as enthralled with her appearance as her voice. With an affinity for poofy chiffon, feathers in her hair and her own uninhibited brand of twirly dancing (much how I dance when I think no one's watching), Heap's onstage persona matches her sweet, whimsical sound. She's been writing songs since age 11, and watching her prance around in a puffy pink frock, it's not hard to imagine 29-year-old Heap as a musical little girl. That's not to discredit her talent, though: Heap is a classically trained piano and strings player who's also skilled in sequencing and engineering, and is involved in nearly every aspect of producing her albums, from start to finish. At first listen, she's an upbeat Tori Amos-Björk electronica hybrid, but each live show pushes her a little farther into that hard-to-describe category. Between haunting harmonies, infectious melodies and a solid beat, many of Heap's tracks are equally appropriate for dancing as for navel-gazing, making the crowds at her shows a fun bunch to observe.

Immi, as she's called by friends and fans alike, released her first album, *iMegaphone* (an anagram of "Imogen Heap") in 1998, at the tender age of 21. She returned to the studio in 2002 as half of short-lived electronica duo Frou Frou and released her second solo album, *Speak for Yourself*, in 2005. That's when American ears really started to perk up: The melodic, wistful track "Hide and Seek" appeared on *The L Word*, *CSI: Miami* and the second season finale of *The O.C.* Her American fan base is especially strong in San Francisco, where Heap had a month-long residency at famous music club Bottom of the Hill in the '90s.

"I had a great time," she remembers, admitting that she might not have been *technically* old enough to be playing at the venue. "Or I couldn't have a drink there, probably. But it was great, and I love San Francisco for that reason."

She's currently back in the studio, working on her second record under RCA. "I'm quite looking forward, actually, to the fact that in between this record and the next record, I don't have to go through the trouble of finding another label that I'm happy with, or, you know, *not* finding a label," she says. "I think I've found a home with my music, 'cause I'm licensing the record to them so I'm not strictly confined to them. But I really love the people that are working on this record."

Heap doesn't yet have a release date for the new album, but in the meantime you can catch her on "Go Green," a Greenpeace charity track that also features Sarah McLachlan, Annie Lennox and Bonnie Raitt. — *Catherine Plato*



>>Read our full interview with Heap at curvemag.com.