



Tori Amos
To Venus and Back
(Atlantic)

Tori Amos entered the studio intending to compile her first official live album from recordings of her previous tour; before she knew it, new tunes were pouring out. Never one to force her will on fate, she suddenly changed her plans. The result is *To Venus and Back*, a double-disc set composed of 11 new studio tracks and 13 live cuts ranging from popular singles to rare B-sides.

The first disc is a new direction—sort of. "Josephine" was so familiar I literally cut it short looking for the Sisters of Mercy's "1959" to compare piano lines. Without being rehashes, some songs recall their old incarnations, though few utilize the piano as a prominent instrument. Overall, part one has an electronica/industrial feel that harkens back to her 1998 track "Raspberry Swirl." And not surprisingly, her subtle lyrical references to Nine Inch Nails have grown into blatant stylistic similarities. "Suede," a standout here and in concert, is a powerful Reznor-style tune with a dark, dominating vibe. Throughout, the new material cops an old feel. On the flip side, old tunes get Amos's new, plugged-in twist.

Disc two, which includes band intros and between-song babble, begins with a show-opening lead into the first track, "Precious Things." It's not the best version I've heard, but it benefits from the full-band treatment; I'd be content never hearing it acoustic again. But "Cooling," "Mr. Zebra," and "Cloud on My Tongue," taken from mid-show solo segments, are bittersweet reminders of her past all-acoustic shows. The badass bass line on "Space Dog" puts pleasure back into the pain she's unleashing, and her reworking of "The Waitress" gives that "I believe in peace, bitch" line the punch it deserves. *To Venus and Back* essentially says, "Hey, check out what I can do with a band!" **Tori Amos: Rock Star.**

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