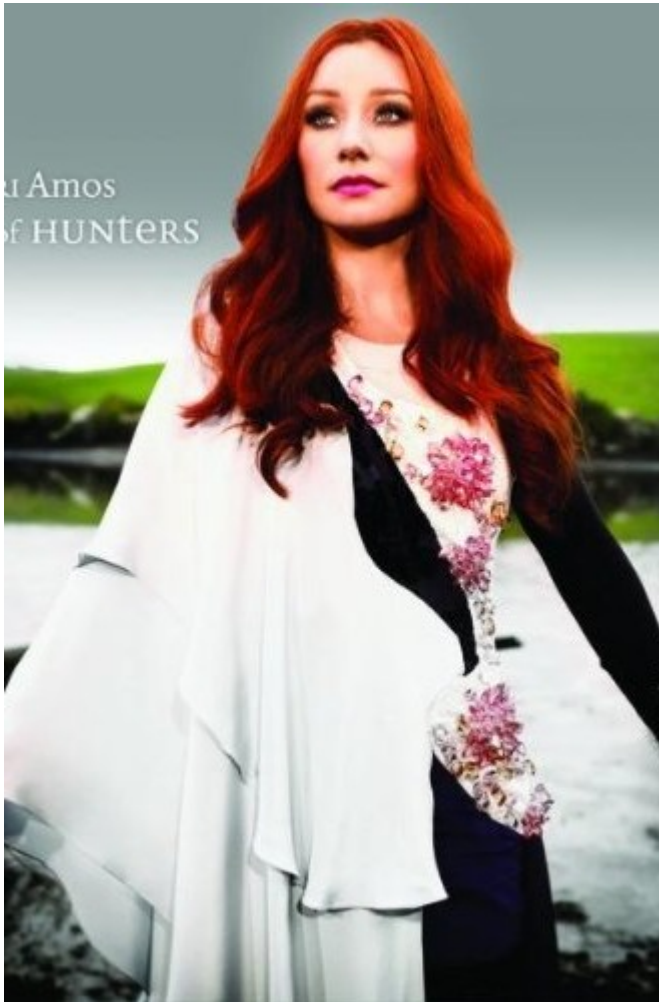


Night of Hunters, by Tori Amos

reviewed by [Steve Thorngate](#) in the [October 18, 2011](#) issue

In Review



Night of Hunters

by Tori Amos

Deutsche Grammophon

As a pianist, Tori Amos's skill and classical pedigree are peerless in the pop world; as a songwriter she is talented but gratuitous and opaque. So while it's hard to imagine many pop artists signing up to write a song cycle based on the history of classical

music, for Amos—whom Deutsche Grammophon approached with this idea—the project seems almost inevitable.

Night of Hunters strains under its conceptual weight. The composition takes a largely theme-and-variations approach, forgoing verse-chorus pop form—something Amos has always held loosely—in favor of developing ideas a movement at a time. Within this structure Amos pays specific tribute to several composers from the last 400 years. As if that wasn't enough, the album is centered on the idea of hunting, a metaphor for a dying relationship. At some point we flash back to ancient Ireland, with themes of violence, paganism and female empowerment. There is also a peyote theme. Very little of this is clear on first listen.

Yet for all of its opaque excess, this is also the most musically cohesive and interesting thing Amos has put out in years. She's always been best at her most restrained, writing pristine (if lyrically inscrutable) pop songs and playing the hell out of them. The soulful "Job's Coffin" recalls a bit of this, as does the touch of American Songbook harmony and sentimentality in "Your Ghost" and "Carry." But what really makes the record work is the instrumentation. Amos's piano and voice are backed variously by a string quartet, a few wind instruments and the young voices of her daughter and niece—no rhythm section, no electronics. This versatile, all-acoustic sound weaves and swells to support the piano in a way her past arrangements seldom have.

And she sure can play. Amos's piano is moody, dynamic and endlessly textured. She can do a lot of things with her voice as well, from intimate whisper to pop chanteuse to emotive diva. Don't let Amos the over-the-top auteur distract you from Amos the astonishing performer.

Listen to "Job's Coffin":