

# Mother's ruin?

2007 looks like being a big one with three major releases due for LA songwriter, **Beth Waters**. January saw the physical release of her acclaimed third album, *This Little Piggy* - an album whose limited iTunes pre-release saw Waters named alongside the likes of Joanna Newsome, Leigh Nash and Tunng in the site's 2006 singer-songwriter Top 10. An album of lullabies may follow later this year, partly inspired by the third imminent release - Waters' first child. **Trevor Raggatt** settled down with her to talk diapers and musical direction.

*The first question is obvious... 'So, when's it due?'*

**'A**pril 30<sup>th</sup>. And that was a big chance. Musicians often feel like "Well, if somebody gets interested in us and we get picked up then they won't want us if we have a baby". It's scary, you know, because you're trying to be a musician who is available... but it's really a big thing for me. You know, I worked for a long time as a nanny as a day job so I was around kids a lot but really saddened that I couldn't do it myself. So there's this kind of longing.'

'You know, I have a kind of love hate relationship with music, because it hasn't allowed me to do some of the things I wanted to. I spent basically all of my 20s putting every extra cent I had into music. I didn't get to travel much or do a lot of the things I'd like. It's been a sacrifice, but on the other side it's not like it's something you can just choose, you

know, just wake up in the morning and go "Hey. I'll be a musician today". So the last few years I have really wanted to have a life; pushing music into another place, where I can say, "I am not *just* a musician, I have another life, I want a family and be happy". So you know, it's a bold move, but it takes longer to make a record than it does to make a baby!'

Well, it that's the baby talk out of the way the next question must be how she feels about *This Little Piggy*? It's an emphatic response. 'I think it came out wonderfully! Of course, each time you put your heart into something you think it's the best work you've ever done!' That provokes a self-effacing laugh, 'I do feel this album is my most mature effort yet - I had the chance to think a bit more about it and not worry about the commercial value of everything. And my producer's really into that as well. But it's hard to walk that line without overproducing, you know. We really tried to let the personality of the song shine through - picking a few things to highlight it and hoping not to come out with this big mess. So there's all these little nuances and I think gives the album personality.'

'Yeah, there's a lot of nuance in it, using different kinds of instruments. There was one song... you know those little bits of string that maybe you didn't clip off when you restring a guitar? Well, we just plucked those and turned up the mike really loud and it sounded like wind-chimes. And that's the beginning of *This Little Piggy*. I must admit I've fallen in love with that song - thematically, the instrumentation, the way it's put together just seems to have such a soul about it.'

It's certainly a diverse disc, stretching from pop to sultry jazz to bossa-nova! 'It just happened that way. I did have an idea that I wanted to bring some world instruments in on this album though we

didn't end up doing that much. It was more seeing what the songs wanted to do; each individual song... As opposed to trying to make a sound for the whole record but hoping in the end of the didn't sound too disjointed.' The singer pauses for a moment and seems to surprise herself, 'Actually, I was surprised that I let myself do that because I'm very controlling about my work... but with this album I had to be really trusting and open-minded. Ha!'

One of the striking things about the album is that although it touches on some dark issues – self worth, child abuse, isolation – laden with catchy hooks it retains an uplifting feel. 'Well, you know, I always sort of want to write "sunshine through rain" because I do feel like I want to take you on a journey. I almost feel they're kind of like little movies where you can sort of picture what's going on in the story. And that whole melancholy portion of it... I just enjoy exploring an emotion but having some resolve to it. Because otherwise you are going to want to slit your wrists at the end!' Another chuckle, 'I never have been one to write completely happy songs because... they're boring. I wouldn't want to write something that's just so flat like that.'

'It's hard to look at it as the listener, but all of the songs talk about coming into your own or self-realisation. I do think my life has changed in the past five or six years, pretty dramatically. So I think that does come through. I haven't really sat down and analysed it but sometimes I go back later to songs like *Lifeguard*, and I think "This song means so much more to me now than it did when I wrote it." There's the whole desert theme, like, feeling like you're being left out in the cold or whatever. Almost saving yourself instead of needing to be saved. It's like in *...Piggy* were she's planning to run away and she's going to save herself as opposed to being saved by somebody else; so that definitely come out and I think that's how I feel about myself in my life.

'But the choruses sort bring a lightness to it; always gives them a feeling of resolve in that you feel like "Phew, thank God." But

you know, I just love it. I love choruses. That's one of my problems with Fiona Apple. Although I loved her stuff I could never sing along! It was like she's going all over the place vocally and I just can't get a handle on it! Sometimes there has to be some predictability about music, to make it enjoyable without being boring. It's like the Beatles you wanna know this is the chorus, because next time around you're *gonna* sing with it. That's what's fun about music.'

The album finishes with a tender cover of *Slip Slidin' Away*. I wonder why that particular song? This provokes a cheeky grin. 'Other than, of course, just being a huge Paul Simon fan? Ha-ha! I was addicted to *Negotiations and Love Songs*, the compilation album, and of course that's on there. To me he's like the ultimate songwriter so it's kinda my ode to him. I just learned it on the piano and did it live a few times and, you know, I just got such a feeling of the audience being moved by the lyrics and the song. They said to me "You know, I never really heard this song this way; never really liked it before... but now I understand it." The lyrics are so intense and really much more melancholy than the tune allows them to be. So there's this whole range of emotions you can get at, slowing it down. Letting the listener hear them in the context I'd always heard them in - sort of sad.'

Of course, Waters'... ahem... condition begs some questions about promoting the album. 'Well, you know, we're small record label - my husband and myself - and so I'm going to be playing here until I get too pregnant to play live. Of course with this album, it's going to be hard to tour and do the usual round of promotions. Though, we are going to be offering it in the UK through Amazon as our distributor. So that'll be great. Hopefully we'll also be doing a lot of placements on television shows. The things we've got in the past have been by chance. Like, "*One Life to Live*", we got because the music supervisor just called us up out of the blue saying they wanted the song. That was great, but definitely being

more proactive about placement will help people to the record. And hopefully help get more magazines and whatever.'

Our conversation is one week before Waters is name-checked in the iTunes top tens but, somehow presciently, I ask how she feels it's been received online. 'Oh, I don't know how we'd have survived without iTunes! You know, we made most of our money from the last record through iTunes and from placements. We had physical distribution here in the US but it's so expensive. So we were working two jobs, trying make it work and trying to do as much as we could, but iTunes really came through. So much support for independent music is through the Internet and *This Little Piggy* wouldn't exist without it.'

I mention that I've heard on the grapevine that she's already planning album number 4. 'Oh yeah! I so want to do it. I really want to do this album of really calming lullabies, just for relaxing and falling asleep to. The ones I've written seem so kinda "*classic*". Really simple; just humming no words - this was like when I was a nanny rocking babies to sleep. And there's just something about it that I felt it would make a great album that people would love to hear. Something very stripped down. And of course, a knowing laugh, 'great cross promotion! Ha-ha!'

'You know, I've listened to a lot of children's music and some'll just drive you up the wall. Badly written, the lyrics don't make sense... But intelligent children's music makes a lot of sense because parents can enjoy themselves listening to it as well. And kids grow up listening to music that actually has a good influence on their musical choices later on. I have heard a little bit of that... but not much. Yeah, kids deserve good music to! After all, they're the next crop! So I'm hoping to have that done by Christmas, but we'll see. I did lead people on to believe this album would be done and released this year. So we'll see. Hmm, I might be a little busy, but also have a good reason to write some lullabies, for sure. A little more inspiration. We'll wait and see...'

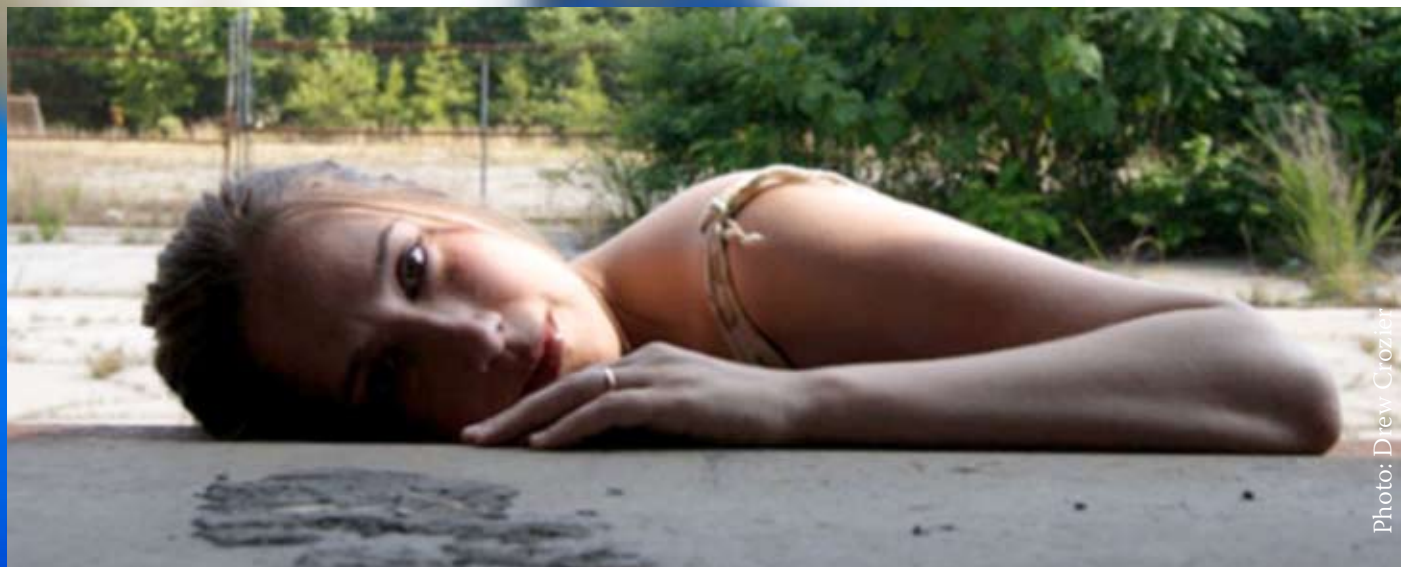


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