

LEENY and TAMARA

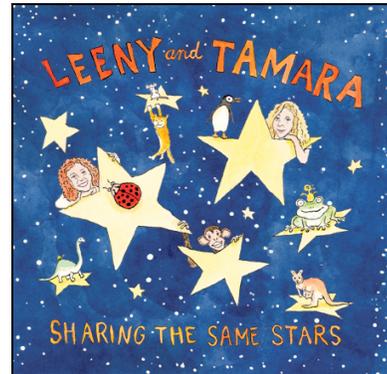
THE MAKING OF *SHARING THE SAME STARS*

“Don’t worry, nothing happened to Steve!” Leeny (Ilene Altman) replies when asked about her previous musical partner. Leeny and Steve’s debut children’s CD, *Be Nice*, garnered several honors in 2008, including a Parents’ Choice Award and a Children’s Music Web Award as Best Recording for Preschoolers. “As we were releasing the first album, I just couldn’t stop writing new songs, so I figured I better take full advantage of this boon of creative juices (not from concentrate). Since Steve was up to his ankles crushing grapes, pursuing his dream to be a winemaker, I thought it would be fun to try to write with another longtime friend, Tamara Hey.”

Called “one of the best songwriters in town,” NYC singer/songwriter Tamara jumped at the opportunity. “When Ilene asked me if I would be interested in writing kids’ tunes, I thought it would be a cool challenge,” Tamara says. “I really liked Leeny and Steve’s album – the sense of humor, the lyrics that were educational while still being fun. The music seemed like it would be a blast to perform, and appeal to adults as well as kids. Plus, I learned new things from those songs!” “I was looking forward to recording duets because I thought our unique vocal styles would sound interesting together,” Leeny says. “As I was coming up with new songs, I was writing some of them with Tamara’s voice in mind, and with riffs and melodies that I knew she would dig.”

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The result is Leeny’s sophomore release, *Sharing the Same Stars* by Leeny and Tamara, an album of duets and shared lead vocal duties. “The title comes from a lyric in our song, ‘It’s Cool To Be You,’” Tamara says. “‘We are all just people who are different, but all of us are sharing the same stars. How we treat people who are different makes us the kind of people who we are.’ That pretty much sums up what we were trying to get across with that song and this record in general.



We weren’t trying to make a political statement or anything like that...” Leeny continues “...but really just to convey a message of acceptance. Different is good, so just be yourself. It all starts when we’re kids – learning social behavior, figuring out right from wrong. But it’s also about respecting animals and the Earth, appreciating what you have and sharing. We’re all in this world together so we’d better make the best of it!”

The pair first met when they attended Berklee College of Music in the early ’90s as songwriting students. Tamara recalls their initial meeting: “I introduced myself, and I must say, she totally blew me off!” “So not true!” Leeny counters. “Tamara doesn’t know this, but I may have been a little intimidated by her. Oh man, now I’ll never hear the end of it!” Tamara adds, “We shared a love of the Odd Couple and Seinfeld, The Beatles, and Raising Arizona. We were fast friends and admired each other’s different songwriting styles.” Leeny continues, “And it turned out that Tamara had gone to high school (The School of Performing Arts in NYC) with one of my cousins. I love ‘small world’ stuff like that. Funny, it only took 20 years for us to write together again!”

Leeny and Tamara enlisted the help of friend, producer, multi-instrumentalist, and arranger, Art Hays, who produced Tamara’s previous CDs, *Miserably Happy* (2008) and *Right This Minute* (2005). The two positively gush when speaking about Hays. Tamara says, “Art has so many great
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ideas about arrangements, background vocals, and parts, and he hears things that nobody else picks up. He also comes from the same era as we do and appreciates Sesame Street, The Electric Company, and Schoolhouse Rock and understands why they were so special.” Leeny notes, “It seems like he knows every single song ever recorded. Art really wanted to make sure he captured the sound of specific genres very authentically (i.e. reggae, ’60s girl groups) – you mention a style and he just gets it. And he can play so many instruments so well – sax, guitar, bass, flute, clarinet, all the drum programming. I think if we’d given him time, he probably could have learned to play the fiddle!”



“We were also very fortunate that an amazing pianist and trumpeter just happened to be married to Tamara, and added his handiwork to a few tracks,” says Leeny about Henry Hey, who has toured and recorded with artists including Rod Stewart and Harry Belafonte. Virtuoso contemporary violinist Christian Howes (Les Paul, Bill Evans) played fiddle on “Across the USA” and the talented Colton Weatherston (Hot Club of Detroit) played electric guitar on “Put On My Seat Belt.” Key Wilde created the artwork and design for the album. “Key is an incredible artist and children’s musician, and his illustrations are like little perfect works of art for each song,” says Tamara. “And mastering engineer Duncan Stanbury (formerly of the legendary Frankford Wayne in NYC) gave our album the clean, vibrant sound we were looking for.”

Leeny recounts the first day of recording at Art’s studio in New York on January 15: “I remember how peaceful and beautiful it was waking up that morning with snow falling. Tamara was a little bummed out about the snow and frigid

temperatures, but I said, ‘Snow is good luck!’ At our recording session that afternoon, we heard that a plane had crash-landed into the Hudson River, just a couple of miles from us. Later we discovered the heroic story of Captain Chesley B. ‘Sully’ Sullenberger III and the miracle of US Air Flight #1549. It felt like this album would be inextricably tied to that event.”

The songs are geared toward children ages 12 months to 10 years. But Tamara mentions that, “Even infants as young as five months in my Bouncing Baby Music class react positively to the music, and parents appreciate stuff that’s cool musically and lyrically. Because we decided not to focus on a specific age, *Sharing the Same Stars* will last longer through a child’s life. There are songs that kids can enjoy today and others that they can grow into. We all sang songs when we were kids that made little sense to us then, but we didn’t care because they were catchy and fun to sing – we didn’t even realize we were learning anything! That’s the kind of record we wanted to make.” “And we’ve used a lot of our own childhood experiences, about overcoming shyness or dealing with an incorrigible little sister, to relate to what kids are going through,” Leeny says. “One of the most important songs on the CD is ‘Put On My Seat Belt.’ If we can help increase child passenger safety, and maybe even get kids to be a part of improving adults’ seat belt usage, then we really can’t ask for much more than that.”

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One of the more ambitious songs on the CD is “Across the USA,” a marathon of a song with lyrics that include facts about every state. “I had this vision that next July 4th, Tamara and I would kick off a ‘50 States In 50 Days Tour!’” Leeny says. “It’s always been a little dream of mine to visit all 50 states and this seems like the perfect opportunity!” Tamara chimes in, “Maybe for the next album we should do a song about Italy or Paris... I’ll sign up for that tour right now!” In the meantime, keep an eye out for live performances in the northeast where they are based (Leeny in MA and Tamara in NY). They are also available for school and educational programs, and writing custom songs for special projects.