



Tomaloff channels inspiration into music and books



☺ David Tomaloff singing songs, but -- who knows -- maybe thinking about poetry.



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When David Tomaloff's solo disc, "Birds on Wires," appeared last year, it knocked our socks off. Here was a guy on the local scene writing great songs and making a subtle, nuanced alt.country record that deserved attention.

We immediately asked him to contribute a remixed version of one of the songs to the upcoming third OnMilwaukee.com local music CD.

Then, the Racine-based Tomaloff said he wrote a book called "Liontamer's Blues," published by his own Six Eight Publishing. Considering the literary quality of his songwriting, it was hardly a surprise. But, Tomaloff says, it was kind of a surprise to him, in a sense.

"The book itself just kind of 'happened,'" he says. "It really began as a blog under the name 'Liontamer's Blues' (<http://liontamersblues.tumblr.com>). Creative exercise has become very important to me in the last couple of years, regardless of what avenue it seems to want to go down. I let it decide for itself; I stay open to it. I've gotten very into photography for the same reason and the blog reflects this as well."

Tomaloff says that "Birds on Wires" emerged from a very creative period and because he was smart enough to catalog the inspiration as it arrived, there was more there than could be converted into musical zeroes and ones.

"While working on my record, I would write things down as they came to me, whether or not they struck me as musical ideas," he recalls. "I began to realize I had a bunch of this other stuff. I thought it was all very interesting but I had no idea what to do with it."

"Well, along came the blog idea. From there, I decided I wanted to have this stuff in hard copy as well, even if it was just for myself. I come from the world of music where many of us DIY, so I decided to publish under my own imprint and the book was born. As I understand it, this is somewhat frowned upon in the literary world, but creative output is key here and I'm not the type to wait until someone gives me permission."

While it's tempting to view a songwriter's poetry as song lyrics without music, Tomaloff says that for him there is a difference.

"They are actually very different for me. In fact, I originally intended to include some 'lost lyrics'" in the book (hence the subtitle, 'Random musings, lost songs, and other states of mind...'), but I found it broke up the feel of the book a little too much. Lyrics can be very poetic, obviously, and there is a certain lyrical quality in the cadence of a lot of poetry but, for me, they present themselves in very different ways overall and don't seem to cross well.

"That said, anyone who listens to 'Birds on Wires' and reads 'Liontamer's Blues' might notice similarities in a few of the book pieces to a few of the songs on the record where I did lift a little from myself and adapt poetic lines into songs. The lyrics to the song, 'I'm a Madhouse,' were actually a failed poem turned into a song. I couldn't make it work but really liked some of the lines in the piece; they just happened to really 'speak' somehow as lyrics. I don't always know exactly what it is, but there's definitely a difference."

Unlike songwriting, which Tomaloff has done for a long time - as a solo artist and before that with his band The Dammitheads - poetry is a new outlet for his inspiration. But, he says, he's long been a lover of the medium.

"I've always been an avid reader of poetry," he says. "I'm a very big fan of the written word in any form and I love the subtleties of language. I've tended to focus on music and ignore anything that came to me in any other form without a specific avenue for it to travel down. These days I just let it all fall where it may and see where it takes me."

Does the inspiration for the music and the poetry come from the same place?

"That's a really good question and the answer is that I'm not always totally sure myself," Tomaloff admits. "I've been very lucky in the way that both mediums tend to guide me through most of the process and then it's really a matter of tidying up the ends and making sure it all makes enough sense.

"The process of writing, for me, is the process of figuring out what I'm writing about most of the time. I'm a person whose mind is always at work on some level whether I like it or not, and often, whether poetry or lyrics, this stuff will happen at the most inopportune times and the challenge is to be ready to take it down."

Tomaloff has been ready to "take it down" a lot lately and he says a little solitude - sort of a la Bon Iver maybe - paid off recently.

"I'm already about 75 percent through the writing of book number two, which is shaping up really well, I think," he says. "I spent some time writing in a cabin up north this winter and that really gave the latest work a nice boost ... a little wine, lots of quiet and lots of snow really goes a long way toward this sort of thing. As far as the writing goes, as long as that voice remains a force that needs to distinguish itself, I'm hooked."

So far, we're hooked, too.