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Rahav Segev

Marianne Nowotny at Knitting Factory's Old Office on Wednesday.

**POP REVIEW**

## An Ethereal Young Voice From an Inner Neverland

By JON PARELES

Bucolic kitsch surrounded Marianne Nowotny when she performed on Wednesday night at the Knitting Factory's Old Office. Under her keyboard a boxed plastic flower illuminated by fiber-optic threads changed colors; two windup chipmunks sat on top of its box. Behind her was an electronic bird that flapped its wings and could chirp Beethoven's "Ode to Joy." In a modest way, the goofy props placed Ms. Nowotny in the sphere where her songs unfold, an artificial neverland of shimmering synthetic chords and tremulous melodies.

Ms. Nowotny is 16, lives in New Jersey and has made an album, "Afraid of Me" (Abaton), and other recordings. One song, she said, was inspired by a section of the book "Chicken Soup for the Teen-Age Soul"; another was about her prom date. Yet she is far removed from the romantic bromides of chart-topping kiddie-pop. Her songs float in their own sense of time and gaze

inward, drifting through private references and playful doggerel.

Making her keyboard sound like a string section or a music box, a harp or a set of bells, Ms. Nowotny sets up rippling, two-chord patterns that speed up and slow down at whim, carrying singsong melodies.

Her voice swells and catches as she sings about dreamlike journeys and thoughts of love: "You keep traveling west, I'll travel east/And at the end of the world we'll meet."

In some ways the songs echo the childlike, elemental side of Meredith Monk and the breathy volatility and oblique lyrics of Tori Amos.

But Ms. Nowotny is more waywardly ethereal than either of them, and her gusty, amorphous structures and the disembodied tones of her Concertmate keyboard add up to something all her own.

Her songs sound like a teen-ager thinking for herself, heedless of the outside world.

Books of The Times: Weekdays