

## AFRAID OF NOWOTTNY

By Peter Landau



Rare enough is the discovery of an original talent. You never know where a unique voice will sound from, though few would venture to search in northwestern New Jersey. But that's exactly where the 16-year-old, tall, attractive, bleached-blonde **Marianne Nowotny** lives--Sparta, New Jersey, where she cuts quite the figure with her heavy Goth fixation and Victorian wardrobe.

That's right, 16 years old. Nowotny is still in high school. It was only this year that she started performing in bars where she can't legally drink. Last Friday found her wowing a crowd of jaded music journalists and professionals at the sold-out CMJ festival showcase at the Knitting Factory. Nowotny's music is not only wholly her own, but her stage show is equally engaging, usually involving an arts-and-crafts, DIY sensibility that completes the otherworldliness of her compositions.

Her recently released debut CD, *Afraid of Me* (available from Abaton Book Company, 973 300-9886), is produced by playwright **Lauri Bortz**, proprietor of Abaton. The recording was engineered by **Mark Dagley**, a visual artist and founding member of the late 1970s punk/Dada group Girls. The digital mastering was done by Grammy nominee **Steve Vavagiakis**, but don't expect any slick industry fluff crooning from your speakers.

Although Nowotny is as old as **Brittney Spears**, she's no creative contemporary of the **Backstreet Boys**, **N'Sync** and **98 Degrees**. The teenybopper cookie-cutter machine that produces new fodder for the insatiable market of little schoolgirls could never punch out anything as strikingly strange as *Afraid of Me*. Nowotny's collection (a reprint of her first

limited-edition pressing with an additional 10 brand-new cuts) "is able to create an intimate space with her music that is original in its stoic intensity," says Dagley. "She is truly a natural."

It's hard to put Nowotny's music into words. For such a youngster, she sings with the intensity and breath of experience of one far older. Her music incorporates only a lone keyboard seasoned with a stew of special effects that boil to a bubbly brew as in a witch's cauldron. It's a taste that's intoxicating and addictive.

Nowotny learned the rudiments of piano playing from her mother, a classical pianist, but quickly developed a style all her own. Absorbing influences as diverse as Eastern music and electronic pop rock, Nowotny's arcane, complex lyrics and kaleidoscopic song structures deliver a kind of avant-pop expressionism, says her official release. It's a highly personalized form of pop music; once you get it you can't get enough.

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