

'I started songs about fear and guilt and doubt'

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Sally Seltmann dug deep for LP *Hey Daydreamer*, mining emotional elements from within.

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Sally Seltmann performs 'The Small Hotel'

Australian singer-songwriter Sally Seltmann performs an acoustic version of *The Small Hotel*, from her new album *Hey Daydreamer*.

Sally Seltmann, the alternative pop singer and songwriter, wears a simple necklace. It's actually a replacement, bought for her by her husband, the Avalanches mainstay and now her co-producer Darren Seltmann. It replaces one that was passed down to Seltmann via her grandmother and mother, before she lost the piece of jewellery on a flight to Paris.

"I told my mum that I'd lost the original, expecting that she'd be really mad at me," recalls Seltmann, "but she just said, 'Don't worry, you're the one that told me that objects don't really mean anything compared to the actual people we love.'"

Seltmann, who has just released her best album to date, *Hey Daydreamer*, tends to influence others more than she realises. The 38-year-old is an introvert who went to Sydney's College of Fine Arts to study film. She was discouraged by the collaborative group projects, before discovering the satisfaction of the darkroom and embracing photography, while first pursuing music.



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According to Seltmann, her five-year-old daughter, Judy, is a talkative extrovert, like her father. Sometimes when they're on holiday with another family, Judy will be perplexed as to why an accompanying child enjoys being on their own - oblivious to the fact that this was how her mother often spent her own childhood.

"Touring is exhausting because I'm not extroverted, but when I'm by myself writing I feel really good," says Seltmann, who values the "little rooms" where she creatively resides, writing and sometimes recording her music. A previous one was in Yarraville, the last one was in the inner-Sydney suburb of Newtown, the next is in Silverlake, the hip Los Angeles suburb where the Seltmann family moved just prior to Christmas.

"I have a really good [music] publisher based in LA and I go there once a year to do co-writing, and my best friend, [multi-instrumentalist] Lara Meyerratken - is there," she explains, sitting in an East Brunswick café prior to an on-air performance at community radio station Triple R. "We'd never lived there and we could get visas and I had a record coming out, so we decided to try it."

Seltmann has assiduously built a solo career after her early years in '90s-era Sydney indie-pop bands. Her first two albums were released under the moniker New Buffalo, before she switched to Sally Seltmann. Her biggest success remains the 2007 Feist hit, *1, 2, 3, 4*, which she co-wrote with the Canadian singer-songwriter and was subsequently picked up by Apple for a widely seen commercial.

If Seltmann's early albums were calm and sometimes monochromatic, *Hey Daydreamer* has the depth of an airy, fantastical feel that steadily reveals an uneasy lyrical outlook. Woodwind flourishes and expansive melodies frame the songs, reflecting the collaboration with her husband, who had previously only played a peripheral part in her recordings since putting together her debut EP in 2001.

"I did feel that I had to prove myself, especially as a woman, by doing it on my own. It was important for me, but since having my daughter I've loosened up and now it's so much about the three of us as a unit that extended to music," she notes.

Seltmann discussed her ideas with her husband early on and kept him updated through the recording of the basic tracks. Sometimes his notes for a song would consist of a single phrase, such as "baroque circus" or "tropical duck rock", which Darren would then implement as he helped add more layers and mixed the finished collaboration.

"Danger, devotion, freedom and fear, so closely entwined for so many years," Seltmann sings on *Billy* and the record is concerned with the emotional elements inside us, as opposed to what we face in the world.

"I'd been working hard, while raising a child, so I started songs about fear and guilt and doubt. The carefree wasn't interesting me. I didn't want to venture into child land. I love my daughter so much, but I still want to be the kind of artist who writes songs that my child doesn't relate to."

This year Seltmann will be back and forth between Australia and North America. Living in Los Angeles will give her further access to songwriting sessions, which can happen everywhere from the legendary Capitol building to the suburban living room of her new collaborator's parents. Los Angeles is an endless city, but Seltmann well knows how to put it into her manageable scale.

"I will set up my little room," she says, "and get a piano."

Sally Seltmann's *Hey Daydreamer* is out now. Seltmann appears at the Caravan Music Club, Oakleigh on April 11.

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