

MUSIC

## Mother Soki builds on viral success

Singer-songwriter, touring internationally this spring, is set to perform in Minneapolis

By Kathryn Kovalenko  
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Annie Tammearu needed to be on stage in two minutes. But she was in the basement green room, playing solitaire and trying to calm her nerves.

Tammearu, who makes indie music under the name Mother Soki, was playing alongside Dad Bod and Henry James in July 2025 at the Art House North in St. Paul. It was Tammearu's first show since the demo of her song "Rivet Gun" had gone viral on social media in April 2025. The song's success launched Tammearu into a whirlwind year where she signed with a record label, released her first EP and toured across the country.

She's touring internationally this spring but has a local show April 7 in Minneapolis.

Tammearu, 22, said she has never felt as many emotions as she has this year. But for her St. Paul show, all she felt was the pressure.

"It was probably the most nervous I'd been for a show, just because it was the first show after 'Rivet Gun,'" she said. "It all happens so fast, and I think a lot of people don't talk about the expectations that come after that (breakout single)."

Tammearu didn't know if many people would attend the show, but when she stepped on stage, the St. Paul venue was hot from the packed crowd. Afterward, a fan asked Tammearu for a picture for the first time, and another gave her a bracelet.

"The number of people that showed up was crazy. ... It's just like, whoa, people love that song," she said. "It was very surreal."



Annie Tammearu, pictured last fall, is a Minneapolis-based artist who makes music under the name Mother Soki. She was launched into the spotlight after her song "Rivet Gun" went viral on TikTok in April 2025. Now, she's trying to follow up her hit with the kind of music she wants to listen to. "I'm still building as an artist, so I appreciate that it didn't go exactly zero to 100," Tammearu said. "I can still build and slowly show people what else I can make, and not create one 'Rivet Gun' after another." COURTESY OF DAVID MILAN KELLY

**MOTHER SOKI IN MINNEAPOLIS**

Mother Soki's next Twin Cities show is April 7 at Zhora Darling in Minneapolis. For tickets, visit [www.zhoradarling.com/events](http://www.zhoradarling.com/events).

**TRIED FASHION DESIGN**

Tammearu grew up in the Minnetonka area, experimenting with various kinds of art as a teenager, including multimedia and fashion. After high school, she decided to study fashion design at Columbia College Chicago.

Before leaving for her freshman year, Tammearu sold her car, thinking she'd never move back to the Twin Cities. But after two years of studying in Chicago, she began producing songs on GarageBand and lost interest in sewing clothes. She wanted to make music, and decided to move back to

Minneapolis to "recalibrate."

"I was so nervous on the drive back," she said. "I was like, 'I'm literally giving up my life here in this city that I thought could change everything.'"

However, as Tammearu restarted her life in Minneapolis, she said it was like "seeing the city for the first time" as she connected with local musicians. She met her producer and partner, Jack Pfeffer, on Hinge. Tammearu visited Pfeffer's studio the first time they hung out, and the two immediately began making music.

"We had a lot of musical chemistry, and we started to

just play around with songs," Tammearu said. "Working with Jack is great, because he knows exactly what I'm going for every time I send him a demo."

Tammearu also began playing with her guitarist, Elijah Herchert, and roommate and bassist, Mo Todd.

Along with making music, she worked at Bob's Java Hut in Uptown Minneapolis. During one of her barista shifts in April 2025, she posted a demo of a song she was working on to TikTok without thinking much of it.

The video, "Rivet Gun," quickly gained thousands of likes and shares. British musician Ellie Goulding posted a video with the song, asking, "What is this sorcery?"

See **TAMMEARU** on Page A5

OPINION

## Our TSA agents are selling blood to get money for food



**Joe Soucheray**  
COLUMNIST

How we must look to the rest of the world is embarrassing. Getting out of a major American airport right now is like trying to get out of Burkina Faso during a coup.

Our Transportation Security Administration agents are selling blood to get enough money for food. The politicians who shut down the government are pathetic on both sides of the aisle. They represent themselves. They don't represent us. Starting with the president, they all don't give a damn about us and they are lying if they say they do. TSA agents aren't getting paid. As many as 50 percent of them are calling out of work. They aren't getting paid, and getting a paycheck is as American as flying or eating dinner or buying new shoes.

Nothing much right now distinguishes us from the third world. They are used to inattentive leaders who waste gold on filigree and pretense while they scramble for gas or food or a place to sleep. They must stare at their TV screens in even war-torn African countries and

think we've become a made-for-TV movie about chaotic disruption. Those stupid Americans. They don't even pay their airport security agents. They keep their own citizens waiting more than four hours to board an airplane and then hope they have enough air-traffic controllers in the tower.

We might even flirt with being ashamed. We are led by a small man with absolutely no class, such an unprecedented lack of class or anything even remotely resembling integrity that he posted how happy he was when a former head of the FBI died. That was Robert Mueller, a Medal of Honor and Purple Heart recipient in Vietnam when President Donald Trump was taking precautions to avoid sexually transmitted disease. I am now additionally convinced that Trump Derangement Syndrome is real and is thoroughly owned by the people who actually believe this fop is the answer to anything, much less stability. He offers no hope or example of decency, no courage, no convictions except his demented sense of grandeur. He wastes our gold on filigree and pretense while TSA agents sell their blood.

Trump is everything you would wish your child never to be.

But I didn't elect him to be a nice guy, people tell me. I voted for him to put us back on track and ward off creeping Marxism.

See **SOUCHERAY** on Page A5

# HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH?



A hearty portion of tater tot hotdish is darn tasty. But it turns out there is such a thing as too much of a good thing. That applies to the lottery, too. If you or someone you know is having a hard time knowing when to say when, call 1-800-333-HOPE or text "HOPE" to 53342. Because when it comes to playing the lottery, **it's always good to know your limits.**



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## UTILITY

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### PAYMENT PLANS FOR THOSE NEEDING HELP

That's not the only lesser-known offering that the utility, which is headquartered out of offices adjoining the newly redeveloped, \$250 million McCarrons Water Treatment Plant in Maplewood, has been trying to get out in front of customers. It's little secret that many families who went into hiding during Operation Metro Surge are struggling to pay their bills, and rising utility costs have hit everyone's wallet, regardless of their situation.

St. Paul Regional Water Services is directing those in need of help to make a confidential call to a customer service associate, who will work with them to craft a bill payment plan. That could entail connecting them to assistance providers such as WaterWorks, a St. Paul Regional Water Services initiative that aims to help low-income customers with water and sewer costs, administered jointly with the Community Action Partnership of Ramsey and Washington Counties.

WaterWorks provides up to \$300 annually off total water and sewer bills, a reduction of about 33% for roughly 1,000 customers per year.

"We have an assistance program that's well funded at this point," Vaske said. "The board made a strong commitment about a year and a half ago to fund it. We've seen participation go up."

Additional providers offering emergency utility assistance include the Salvation Army and Ramsey County HouseCalls, and in St. Paul, nonprofits such as Neighborhood House. The utility's customer service number is 651-266-6350.

### WHITE BEAR LAKE, STILLWATER, WOODBURY WEIGH WATER OPTIONS

Overall, it's been a busy time for the utility, which has found its services in increased demand.

In the past three years, St. Paul Regional Water Services has begun discussing the possibility of serving at least a handful of additional cities, most of them in the northeast metro and connected to the same aquifer that serves White Bear Lake. About 14 cities are weighing their options around water services.

Discussions with White Bear Lake got underway as lake levels dropped, and gained steam following documented PFAS contamination. Multiple cities are building new water treatment facilities funded by an \$850 million legal settlement with 3M Co. over landfill-related pollution.

In 2017, a Ramsey County District Court judge responding to a lawsuit filed by lake advocates and a homeowners association concerning



Board of Water Commissioners member Chris Tolbert, front left, and board President Mara Humphrey attend a celebration at St. Paul Regional Water Services' McCarrons Water Treatment Plant in Maplewood on Sept. 25. The utility serves St. Paul and 13 nearby communities. **JOHN AUTHEY — PIONEER PRESS**

White Bear Lake's declining water levels found that the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources had failed to protect the popular recreational waterway and mismanaged groundwater pumping permits in the area. The court ordered the DNR to take proactive measures around the Prairie du Chien-Jordan aquifer, such as barring new wells within a five-mile radius of White Bear Lake, setting annual water withdrawal limits, and working with the Metropolitan Council, the metro's regional planning agency, on conservation goals.

St. Paul Regional Water, which pumps water from the Mississippi River, already provides direct retail service, limited retail or wholesale services to 14 cities, including St. Paul, Maplewood, Roseville, South St. Paul, West St. Paul, Mendota Heights, Arden Hills and others. As the White Bear Lake Area Comprehensive Work Group discussions, which are being coordinated through the Met Council, progress, that number could soon grow by as many as five to seven "priority cities" highlighted by the DNR, Vaske said.

Participants on Wednesday said the work group's focus is wide-ranging, with more than 15 studies underway on groundwater recharging, converting groundwater supplies to surface water, and other efforts around water quantity, quality and conservation.

"Many options have been explored and brought forward to the group, including augmentation, sanitary and storm sewer reuse, and yes, tapping into St. Paul Regional Water," said Shawn Sanders, assistant city administrator for Stillwater.

### ADDITIONAL CITIES

Additional cities involved in talks include Oakdale, Lake Elmo, North Oaks, North St. Paul, New Brighton, White Bear Township and others. In terms of joining SPRWS, "we should know more by this summer as to which of

those options really stands out as a frontrunner," Vaske said.

Clark Schroeder, special projects manager for Lake Elmo, said the city, funded by the multi-city legal settlement with 3M, is building a \$50 million water treatment plant outside the court-ordered five-mile radius from White Bear Lake, but even then, Lake Elmo will face tough scrutiny and state limits on drilling new wells.

"We're studying a lot of different kinds of scenarios, such as taking Met Council sewage water, re-mineralizing it and dumping it into White Bear Lake for boating," Schroeder said. "One of the studies would take surface water from the Mississippi River, treat it ... and dump it into the lake. Another study would take St. Paul Regional Water and pipe it to the cities that are directly around White Bear Lake, switching those communities from groundwater to surface water. I've asked Lake Elmo to be part of that study."

Schroeder said the work group is required to have recommendations for new water services ready by June 30, 2027, and likely will have funding requests before the Legislature in 2028. None of them will be cheap.

Woodbury participates in the work group but has already ruled out a partnership, said Woodbury Public Works Director Mary Van Milligen on Wednesday.

"We currently have temporary water treatment in place to treat for PFAS and are making excellent progress on our permanent water treatment plant, which will come online summer 2028," she said. "There's no reason we would leave groundwater, especially with the investments we've made to date."

### MONEY RUNNING OUT FOR LEAD LINE REPLACEMENTS

For the past few years, the utility has been removing lead-based underground

water lines that connect thousands of private properties in St. Paul and some surrounding areas to street mains. Those water lines are technically the responsibility of the property owner, but the utility has been replacing them free of charge to homeowners who opt in, as part of a federally driven effort to get rid of aged lead lines everywhere.

As of the end of 2025, the utility had replaced some 4,500 of the privately owned 26,000 lead water lines in its service area, and it plans to complete another 2,200 this construction season, or about 27% of the needed replacements.

They'll have enough state and federal funding to replace a few hundred more lead lines in 2027, "but after that, we're out of money," said Vaske, noting those efforts will have cost \$95.5 million by the end of the year. "It's a huge success story. It's just been an expensive problem we're hoping local and federal leaders will continue to support us in solving."

Removing and replacing the remaining lead lines would cost another \$250 million over the next 12 years to meet goals set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, an issue that has drawn Vaske to advocate before state lawmakers multi-

ple times in the last month alone.

St. Paul Regional Water Services, which maintains some 1,200 miles of water mains across its system, handles about 100 water main breaks annually, many of them occurring from November to March, when temperatures hit deep lows or pressure shifts during sudden thaws. The 100-year-old system averages nine breaks for every 100 miles of water main, which beats the industry average of about 12 breaks, said Graeme Chapple, distribution division manager for SPRWS.

Believe it or not, older doesn't always mean more fragile. Some pipe installed before 1930 is more durable than thinner pipe installed in the decades immediately after World War II.

"With 100 breaks a year, it's pretty likely everyone will have one on their street at some point," said Vaske, noting post-thaw temperatures reduce their volume, allowing the utility to shift focus back toward replacing lead lines throughout the spring. "They'll level out now as we shift to construction mode."

Mary Divine and Imani Cruzen contributed to this report.

## SOUCHERAY

From Page 3

How's that working out? Trump's Cabinet meetings might as well be filmed in North Korea what with the obsequious pandering before one of them dares speak. You need a \$50 bill for the gas station. Ground beef is through the roof. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents stomped around here like rabid Goths wearing bearskin vests. You can't fly. And while it is a worthy goal to rid the world of hateful theocrats who wish us dead, will that be accomplished without the world blowing up?

Back when the country actually worked, I probably flew 200 days a year. I pity the people who have to travel and are held captive by political whims and their power-hungry selfishness. All you needed at the airport back in the day was a pack of Marlboros and a plump couple of newspapers printed so late on deadline that they had the previous night's West Coast scores. Hell, before deregulation in 1978, it was not unusual to fly somewhere with six other people on the plane.

Yes, terrorism struck our shores in 2001 and two years later we began getting screened by TSA agents, whose understandable absence has now brought about the longest security lines in the agency's 24-year history.

Delta Air Lines, bless them, has temporarily ended VIP screening services — they go right through — for congressional representatives. They should make it permanent.

And congressional representatives should not be paid a dime until the shutdown is over.

We could ask something from the president, but he would only wonder what's in it for him.

Joe Soucheray can be reached at [jsoucheray@pioneerpress.com](mailto:jsoucheray@pioneerpress.com). Soucheray's "Garage Logic" podcast can be heard at [garagelogic.com](http://garagelogic.com).

## TAMMEARU

From Page 3

TikTok comments wondering when "Rivet Gun" would be released and advising Tammearu to capitalize on its popularity began to roll in.

Pfeffer and Tammearu worked to finish and release "Rivet Gun" as soon as possible. As of this month, the song has more than 14 million streams on Spotify alone.

### 'HARD TO FOLLOW UP'

From there, Tammearu said her year moved fast. She started receiving calls from talent scouts at record labels, and signed to the New York-based indie label Mom + Pop Music in May 2025. Then, after her St. Paul show in July, Tammearu packed up her Subaru Forester and toured across the country. She opened for Teetee and POISON GIRL FRIEND and headlined shows in Los Angeles and New York City.

However, in between shows, she was doing more than just rehearsing. Tammearu and Pfeffer had only been working single to single before "Rivet Gun." To release an EP in 2025, they had to write, record and produce a song every two weeks while on tour. Pfeffer said he produced the last song of the EP, "Bygones," in 48 hours on Tammearu's manager's couch in Los Angeles.

"It was hell on earth in the moment, but looking back

... it's so rewarding. And I'm happy that it turned out the way it did," Pfeffer said.

He said he worked with Tammearu to answer the question: Which direction should they go after "Rivet Gun"?

"It's hard to follow up such a big song that resonated with such a wide audience," Pfeffer said. "We didn't want to try to one-up 'Rivet Gun,' or ... try to manufacture a TikTok hit or something."

The result of their efforts is Tammearu's dark, ambient EP "Fantasy," which blends dream pop sounds and airy, layered vocals with '90s influences such as the Sundays and the Cocteau Twins.

### WHAT'S NEXT

For her next batch of songs, Tammearu said she's looking forward to taking a step back and having time to be meticulous about her music. She's experimenting with '80s sounds, inspired by songs from Joni Mitchell and Madonna.

"I'm excited to show more

of my music and what lengths I can go to," she said.

Tammearu said that as a self-discipline practice, she's been going live on Instagram with a bottle of wine and challenging herself to make a new song on the spot. Pfeffer said she has been sending him increasingly polished demos.

"It's just been pretty incredible to see her progression as a producer and songwriter," he said. "She'll show me this new thing that she made, and there's nothing I would add to it."

Pfeffer said Tammearu is an ideal collaborator because she doesn't impose any typical limits of genre, production or recording on herself.

"That's all kind of out the window when it comes to working with her," he said. "Annie cannot be put in a box."

Whether she is breaking out of TikTok algorithms, moving back home from the big city or blending alternative genres, Tammearu has proven that to be true.



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