

**A Conversation with Amy Correia
by Frank Goodman (5/2005, Puremusic.com)**

When one artist turns me on to another, chances are high that it will be someone whose music becomes important, even essential, to me. That seems to be what's happening with the music of Amy Correia. She's been the first thing I turn on when I get home all week. On a certain musical level, she moved in.

I was at a Thai restaurant the other night with Bill DeMain and the visiting diva Rebecca Martin, lamenting the Martha Wainwright interview that got away. Rebecca threw out Amy's name without missing a beat, said I should talk to her. But you never really know at a moment like that if it will be just another record, or another world that you will return to with a clandestine frequency.

The artist's second CD is called *Lakeville*, after the Massachusetts town of her beginning. Mark Howard's production is sensually celestial. It was the second occasion of collaboration for the artist and producer, although the fruit of the first meeting did not suit the marketing agenda of the label of the moment. There have been a number of labels involved, even though only two CDs have so far appeared. Capitol put the first one out in 2000, *Carnival of Love*. Though it was widely acclaimed critically, it was a less than dream debut for the artist, and involved multiple producers, a long list of musicians, too many labels and too much time. But it definitely put her on the map as an artist of great depth and emotional range.

But *Lakeville* was a completely different story. When the deal with Capitol ended, a limbo began that went on a few years. Amy went back to NYC from L.A. eventually, gigged and woodshedded, wrote. On a trip to L.A. to visit friends, she ran into Mark Howard at a diner. He invited her up to the Paramour estate, where he'd just finished recording an album with Lucinda Williams. In May of 2003 they banged out a half dozen tunes with some friends who were in town. There was no dough to start or continue the project, but with her producer's help, she went back in the fall and with a new batch of players finished the record. The results were nothing short of magical in this writer's opinion, as earthy as they are ethereal. Spooky, but visceral.

When you run into somebody this good, you wonder how you could have missed them for so long, or have done without them. Maybe it was because we had some friends in common, but we got on well after circling each other in the first round. She's no one to trifle with, and has quickly become one of our new favorites. We urge you to pick up *Lakeville*, and know you'll enjoy this conversation with Amy Correia in New York, Nashville calling.

PM: Hi Amy. This is Frank Goodman from Puremusic.com.

AC: Hi Frank.

PM: How you doing?

AC: I'm doing good. How are you?

PM: Good. You got a little time for me?

AC: Yeah.

PM: Oh, good. It's raining like hell today in Nashville. What do you got up there?

AC: Oh, it's beautiful. It's like sixty-two degrees, sunny, a little wind. It's nice.

PM: So what are you doing today?

AC: I'm actually just hanging out. I have a show tonight in Boston with Richard Julian, he's a New York—

PM: Oh, he's a buddy of mine, sure.

AC: So yeah, he and Jim Campilongo and another singer/songwriter named Andrew Vladek and myself are on a bill.

PM: Oh, yeah, I know Campilongo, too. God, that's a cool bill. You got it going on, there. How are you getting to Boston, driving?

AC: Yeah.

PM: Is Julian a good buddy of yours?

AC: Yeah, he is.

PM: So you know Mia, too?

AC: Yes, I do.

PM: She's a good friend of mine from Nashville. Typically, this conversation we're having grew out of another conversation I had with another mutual friend of ours, Rebecca Martin, just the other night.

AC: Yes, she told me that she saw you when she was in Nashville.

PM: We had a really good time. She speaks very highly of you.

AC: Well, she's a really wonderful friend. We've known each other for many years.

PM: I'd only ever interviewed her before, by phone, and I knew her music. And then when I got together with her and Bill DeMain, God, she's a wonderful girl. A very giving person.

So though they be very different, both of your records have this deeply ethereal quality, and yet in your voice I hear a really earthy person. Does that ethereal musical quality translate to a spiritual nature or inclination in yourself? Are you that way?

AC: I don't think so. I think I'm pretty earthy.

PM: I mean, there's some kind of ghostly or ghostly energy around a couple of those songs and some of the images connected with *Lakeville*, but that's more in an earthy kind of way, not a spiritual kind of way, is that right?

AC: I'm not sure what you mean.

PM: I think my real question is, are you a spiritual person?

AC: Oh, of course. I mean, a spiritual person—I think we're all ghosts walking around. I don't think there's any proof to the contrary.

PM: No, not in my world, there's not. I know the dogs I hang out with are always barking at things that I can't see.

AC: [laughs]

PM: Along those lines, too, there's a very endearing anachronistic quality to your music. It really sounds like it's from another time. Based on the disposability of so much of today's music, that's kind of refreshing.

AC: Well, thanks. I don't know. I guess I feel that the ethereal quality of the record was really Mark Howard entirely, my engineer.

PM: Oh, really?

AC: Yeah. I mean, I never said, "Hey, Mark, can you make this sound ethereal?"

[laughter]

AC: That's kind of what he does. I think that the next album probably won't have that quality, but I think it was fitting for those songs. Maybe those songs do have more of an old-fashioned feel. I recorded them in different ways, and I did find that the way he recorded them fit them somehow. And I think that was partly because—as well as the ethereal kind of effects or whatever you want to call them—he just really let the record be a live record. I think that's more of the heart of what the record is really about, more than an ethereal thing.

He recorded a moment in time. We recorded the album in eight days, and that includes the mixing. We actually finished the whole album, literally, in eight days. So there wasn't a lot of fussing around with anything. And I think that's part of what makes it feel maybe of another time, because we recorded it the way I think records were made many years ago.

PM: I think there's a lot of truth to both of those things, that it was the way it was cut. Now, did the tunes, when they were going down live with the small group of people that were assembled in Paramour, did it have the feel that it has on the record, did it have that feel in the room?

AC: Oh, absolutely, because we could hear all of those effects. They were actually coming out of the speakers. We were all sitting in a big ballroom. He's got these enormous speakers, and all the music that he's mixing and recording is coming through the speakers as we're recording it.

PM: So all the speakers are going into the mics.

AC: But I sang into a [Shure SM] 58, which doesn't have a lot of bleed to it, so it really didn't pick up much. It wouldn't even pick up my guitar when I was playing along with it.

PM: So when he soloed your voice [played it back by itself], you wouldn't hear the speakers, you'd just hear what was going into the 58.

AC: Well, that's my understanding of what was happening. I was probably at least thirty feet away from them, it was a big room.

PM: Because I got *Lakeville* from iTunes, I lack credits. I forget who's playing drums on that record.

AC: Oh, yeah, it's too bad iTunes doesn't have credits on there.

PM: It sucks.

AC: Gosh, and my website probably doesn't have them either. That's something I should fix. But my record, of course, has credits. Mark Howard was the producer, mixer, and engineer. And the drummers were Scott Amendola—

PM: Oh, right, from Charlie Hunter's band.

AC: Yeah. And Daryl Johnson played bass.

PM: Right.

AC: And there was also some other drummers, Dean Butterworth, who plays with Ben Harper, he played on a couple tracks.

PM: Wow.

AC: And a drummer named Sean Reinert, who's in Los Angeles, a friend of mine. And there's a band called Aeon Spoke, they're good friends of mine. They recorded about three tracks, it was like that band was my band.

PM: Is that a New York band?

AC: No, they're out in Los Angeles. Also a wonderful cellist, Gerri Sutyak, and my friend Kip Boardman played bass. And a guitar player named Josh Grange.

PM: Oh, yeah, the guy who also plays steel. Oh, he's great.

AC: He's wonderful. Yeah, I just did a show with him in Los Angeles, Josh and a bass player named Brett Simons, and Don Heffington, the drummer.

PM: Speaking of Josh Grange, there's something on that song, "Second Thought," going from the first verse to the chorus that sounds like some mysterious ascending wind. Do you know what that sound is?

AC: [laughs]

PM: What is that? A steel?

AC: [laughs] I think it might be the pedal steel, yeah. With Mark Howard, you never know. I mean, I was trying to see what he was doing, but sometimes he'd like go behind the curtain and tamper with the knobs. I don't know what he was doing! [laughs] And he works so quickly that you really don't have a lot of time to analyze what's going on. I mean, stuff just starts happening. He's got his system, and it works, and it really becomes about the performances.

PM: Wow.

AC: It's really not about the guitar player or drummer going, "Hey, I think I need a little more of this or that." It's really not. You got to really just trust him. He inspired a lot of confidence. And all the players were just like great, you know? It was a lot of fun.

PM: And he's a friend that showed up at the right time.

AC: Yeah. He's somebody that I met when I used to live out in Los Angeles. I had actually gone up to cut a few songs with him when he was in Oxnard, at the Teatro Theater. He had a studio up there with Daniel Lanois.

PM: Right.

AC: That's where they made Willie Nelson's *Teatro* CD for Capitol. And we did a couple of songs, but the Capitol Records people weren't ready for something quite that earthy and ethereal, I guess.

[laughter]

AC: But yeah, it didn't come to pass. But then Mark and I ran into each other, whatever it was, four years later, when I had gone out to Los Angeles and was trying to figure out how I would

make my next record. And I ran into him, and he invited me to come to the Paramour and record for a couple of days. And that's when we finished half the album, really.

PM: Is that quite a joint? Does he own the Paramour?

AC: No, no. He was renting. A woman named Dana is the owner. She bought about six years ago. She bought it from nuns.

PM: Wow!

AC: It used to be a convent after it was this big estate. And then when the nuns moved out, she went in there and started renting it out, and Mark rented the ballroom as a studio.

PM: Wild.

AC: Yeah. Right now he's in Australia, I don't think he's necessarily planning on working there again. He's a gypsy, he moves around.

PM: That's beautiful.

AC: [laughs] So I'm lucky that I got to have that experience with him. And you know what else is kind of funny is that when I made my first album, the very first place I went to record, when he was actually with Virgin Records, was in New Orleans, Daniel Lanois' studio Kingsway. So it's funny, I guess I should have brushed shoulders with Mark during that period, too. Trina Shoemaker was the engineer on those sessions.

PM: Oh, right.

AC: And I remember we were talking about Mark at that time. But he wasn't there that year. So anyway, it all is kind of connected somehow.

PM: Absolutely. "Hold On," that's an incredible song. What inspired that sad song?

AC: Oh, it was inspired by some people that I know, a young woman who is a heroin addict, who's in and out of prison, kind of in the cycle of using, and having to go to prison because she gets caught doing something or other. And the child, meanwhile, is waiting at home for Mom to get it together. So the story continues.

PM: Yeah, it didn't sound like something that you'd read in the paper, it sounded like something you knew for sure.

AC: It's some people I knew out in California. Yeah, it's a very heavy song. It's almost a hard song to pull off live, unless I'm—like I opened for Josh Rouse for about three weeks—

PM: All those guys are friends from Nashville.

AC: Yeah. I had a wonderful time with all those guys.

PM: So was there any interaction with that band on stage? Did you sing with them, or did he back you up or any of that stuff?

AC: I didn't have them back me up. As the opener, you kind of want to save that stuff for the headliner, so I didn't even ask. But I really would love to play with them. We've talked about it, but it didn't happen on the tour. But I usually would go out during the encore and sing "1972."

PM: Who's that singing with you on "Stranded"?

AC: Oh, that's Jonathan Rice. He's a new artist. I think his first record is coming out in May. He's on Warner Bros. And you know what? I just read a review of it in Rolling Stone. They didn't like it. And he's actually a very talented kid. He's only about twenty-two. He's got a very mature voice, I think. You know what I think? He's on a major label, and people love to hate you when you're on a major label. They just think, oh, you must suck. Because people are putting a bunch of money into you, you must suck.

[laughter]

AC: But yeah, I feel for him, because I read that review, and I thought, oh, God, he probably should have just signed with Saddle Creek or something—

[laughter]

AC: —and then they would have liked him a lot more. Because that's where he made his record, with all these people out there in Nebraska who worked with Conor Oberst and Mike Mogis.

PM: Right. Yeah, let them put it out. Or give it to somebody like Nettwerk. I'm sure it's a lot cooler being with Nettwerk than it was with Capitol or Virgin.

AC: Cooler in terms of what?

PM: I don't know, they just seem like a different kind of bunch, or at least from the outside they do. Is it actually more or less the same thing as it has been for you with other labels, or do they get kind of a different spin on the ball?

AC: I'll say this about Nettwerk, I think they will give the artist total freedom. I really think that. I mean, I literally gave them my mastered album, and that's what they put out. They didn't change a thing. I designed all of the artwork. I produced a photo shoot. You know what I mean? I had my friend take the photos. I just submitted them. I felt like they just totally give the artist complete freedom.

PM: That package is something else, Amy. It's really beautiful.

AC: It is kind of ghostly. I guess there is a theme running through there. I'm so glad you like it. Yeah, my friend, the photographer, is a girl named Chris Strother. She's this beautiful woman out in Los Angeles, an incredible photographer, and has done a lot of work with artists, but a lot of people who probably are not big artists. She did Vic Chestnut's recent package. She's just a great artist.

PM: Who are you listening to these days, anybody?

AC: Who am I listening to? Well, I just discovered Wilco. I was not a Wilco fan. I just didn't really know about them. I mean, I knew of them, but this album, *A Ghost is Born*, was a very inspiring album to me.

And, of course, Rebecca Martin. Her new album, again, it inspired me. [see our interview with Rebecca] I listen to things that inspire me to write and to make music, as well as for pleasure, of course. But her album is very moving to me. She just bravely went into her life, and without being confessional, she really revealed a lot of who she is and what she's going through. I just think it's a beautiful record.

Having toured with Josh, I listened to a lot of Josh Rouse. And I think his new album is wonderful.

PM: "It's the nighttime, baby—"

AC: "It's the nighttime, baby, don't let go of my love."

[laughter]

AC: Oh, one other CD lately that turned me on was the new one by Annie Gallup, *Pearl Street*. [see our review] There's a song about her brother Richard that's really incredible.

PM: Have you read anything lately that turned you on?

AC: Right now I'm reading some Alice Munro stories.

PM: Ahh.

AC: I've been reading as I've been spending a lot of time in the airport. I just love her short stories.

PM: Is it that volume *The Love of a Good Woman* or a different one?

AC: It's actually a more recent one. It's called *Vintage*, and it's a lot of different writings of hers. I'm also reading a book called *Nothing Special, Living Zen*, by Charlotte Joko Beck. And I've been reading—I guess I have been reading some spiritual books. What can I say?

PM: That's what I'm talking about.

AC: Yeah, I mean, look—

PM: [laughs]

AC: I mean, life is complex, and it's confusing. I'm trying to figure out what's going on here.

PM: I can dig it, believe me.

AC: What else have I been reading? I also picked up this other book, and frankly, it's way over my head, but it's interesting. What's the title here? I've probably lost it, that tells you how much I'm into it. Well, let me see. It's called *The Elegant Universe*, by Brian Green.

PM: A friend of mine that I interviewed recently, Erika Luckett, was reading that book when I asked her that question. But she's a bit of a quantum physics freak. That's the deal with that book, right?

AC: It is, but I mean, the way that he talks about it—like he uses a lot of metaphors, and he tries to bring it down to earth, but frankly, it's still pretty tough going. But in some way, I guess part of why I wanted to read it was because I was interested in how it might relate to some of the spiritual things I've been reading, some of these philosophies. Okay, I'll come clean. I've also been listening to the tapes of Eckhart Tolle, *The Power of Now*.

PM: My main man, these days.

AC: And I'll tell you, I think listening to the tapes is better than the book.

PM: Definitely. I drove from Philly to Nashville, I listened to the book straight through on CD.

AC: My friend Paul Masvidal, from Aeon Spoke, who plays on my album, he introduced me to these books. And we drove into the desert listening to this stuff, it was magical.

PM: Eckhart is a bad dude, no doubt.

AC: I love his story. It was amazing that he came through such deep despair to the other side and came up with some of these ideas about existence and life.

PM: You're either there to hear what he's saying or you're not. I mean, the first time I picked it up in an airport, I looked at it, went, "*The Power of Now*," and I looked at the photo, and I thought, "Yeah, right..." And I didn't buy it.

[laughter]

PM: Two years later, I picked it up, and I went, "Oh, my..." and bought it immediately. That cat's light bulb went all the way on.

AC: I know. I remember a boyfriend when I was about twenty-four, twenty-five, he gave me the *Celestine Prophecy*. I was living in Chinatown and just starting out doing music. And I mean, I basically broke up with him because he gave me this book.

[laughter]

AC: I was like, “This is the worst book, and I don’t love you.”

[laughter]

PM: That’s pretty harsh.

AC: I still have never read it. But I mean, I can remember, that was the beginning of people trying to turn me on to some spiritual things. I’ve read some Buddhist things.

PM: Are you a Pema Chodron fan, too, the Buddhist nun?

AC: Yes. Charlotte Joko Beck was kind of a precursor to her. And Charlotte’s books are kind of similar, I think, to Pema’s. But yeah, it’s making a big difference, as I just kind of continue to move along this path of making music, and just being in the world, and trying to live some kind of an authentic life, whatever that means.

PM: Yeah.

AC: I can’t say that’s always been the case. In my twenties, and going after my goals of being on a major label—I mean, forget it! I don’t even remember that stuff. I don’t even think I was there for that at all.

PM: Right.

AC: So this is a different time in my life, and for my music. I really feel like I’m just beginning to be in it and enjoy it.

PM: Yeah. The sessions for *Lakeville* are now a couple of years in the past, although the release is just a year in the past. Are you writing any these days? Are you working on new stuff?

AC: I am. I mean, now that the tour with Josh is over, I’m really going to kind of hole myself up for a month or so and—that sounds really awful [laughs] but I kind of need to do that. There are just things I think I’m going to do. Usually I just do everything on my own. I write the songs with a four-track or an ADAT. I don’t have Protools. But whatever I have around that I can work with, and I just really try to uncover some stuff. And I know I’ll do that for at least a couple of weeks, maybe longer.

I’m always writing and accumulating ideas, but now I kind of need to just finish things. I want to get a handful of things that I really feel good about. And then my idea for this album—something

that I've never done on the first album or the second album—is just to put a band together, and then make an album.

I know it sounds funny, but I've never done that. Usually it's different session players or friends who come in and they just play. They either know me or don't know me, they are either familiar with the songs or not. But I really want to work with a couple of musicians and then try to take them on the road. Because mostly I've done things as a solo artist. It just kind of happened that way because of financial reasons, and maybe creative reasons, too. It's a little bit easier just to be on your own in some ways, but I'm really ready to bring in other people. And I know some incredible musicians.

PM: No doubt. Would you be bringing in people from L.A. or New York?

AC: I'm not sure. I've played with Don Heffington and Josh Grange and Brett Simons, and I love playing with them. So I can see myself going back to L.A. and doing a couple of weeks with those guys. So who knows? All of these players, too, they're touring around, and they have lots going on. I would really want to find people who would want to commit to the project. Maybe even do some co-writing, and hopefully—

PM: Really? I didn't know you did that.

AC: I never have. I never have, so those are some thoughts I'm having for the future, perhaps bringing in some other people so that I'm not totally in it on my own, and maybe being able to go on the road with them. Because I think it would be great for my audience, and I just would really enjoy being able to play music with other people, rather than always just with a guitar on stage by myself.

PM: Right. Your baritone uke is an amazing facet of your music. You make that sound incredibly cool.

AC: Oh, thanks. It's inspired some of my favorite songs that I've written. I hope to write more and more on it.

PM: When did you pick that up? Who made it?

AC: Well, it's kind of an interesting story. When I used to live in New York—well, I still live in New York. But when I was in my early twenties and I was working for an ad woman, her name is Josephine Foxworth, she's now eighty-seven—she's actually the woman in that song, “Coney Island,” who turns eighty-four. She's the one who gave me that when I worked for her. And she had actually just asked me to take it home and restring it for her.

[laughter]

PM: That was the end of that.

AC: And one thing led to another, and then a couple weeks went by, and she asked about it. I told her I'd been writing a few songs, and she said, "You'd better hold on to it." That was five, six, seven years ago.

PM: And do you know made it? Is it like a factory instrument, or—

AC: It's from the 1970s. It was actually a gift to this woman, Josephine Foxworth. And I think it's from Mississippi. It's a Harmony.

PM: Wow. Your Boston came out there for a minute—"It's a Hahmony."

AC: I didn't say that, did I?

[laughter]

AC: That's good. That's good. I'm glad I still have a little of it left.

PM: There's a remarkable freedom all over your music, in your writing, your playing, and especially your singing. Does that show up in your personality day-to-day?

AC: That's such a nice question. I like that. Well, first of all, I'm glad you hear that kind of freedom in my music. I would say that in some ways I think I am really free, and in other ways I feel I'm not. I guess I'm striving towards that freedom.

PM: Were you raised that way, or did you teach yourself to be free?

AC: I'm not sure. I mean, I grew up Catholic, which is not normally a liberating atmosphere.

[laughter]

AC: But my mother and my dad, they're really special people. They've always encouraged me to just go out and live my life. They lived kind of a very traditional life. They grew up next door to each other in the same town of Lakeville.

PM: Unbelievable.

AC: Yeah, they've known each other since they were five years old, kind of a small world. I think that gave me a solid foundation. And I like the way my life and career are going. I'm not getting rich off it, but I'm certainly having an adventurous life, and I really feel like that's a blessing.

PM: Yeah, you're living the life, absolutely.

[Then we talked a while about the pros and cons of living in Nashville, the housing situation, and her desire to come down and have a look around, as her list of Nashville friends grows.]

PM: On the news section of your website, it struck me beautifully when you were talking about doing some dates with Aimee Mann in March, you chose to say that her bassist Paul Bryan had made a really good album, which I liked a lot, the *Handcuff King*.

AC: Oh, do you know Paul?

PM: Well, we've emailed in the past, and I'm sorry to say, I never covered that record for one reason or another, but it was great.

AC: Yeah, yeah. [laughs] You know what? This is funny—this is part, I guess, of my own gypsy lifestyle. I'm about to go and live in his apartment, because he's going out to make a bunch of records with Joe Henry in California.

PM: Really?

AC: In California, yeah. He's making a couple records out there with some R&B singers.

PM: Beautiful.

AC: Yeah. So I'm going to be going to live in his apartment for about three months and play with his instruments, and I'm going to do a lot of my writing for my next album. I have an apartment in Brooklyn that I sublet that has a nice bed and some furniture, not a lot. But I don't miss that stuff even one bit. It's been two years since I've lived there. So, yeah, I'm going to be in Paul's house this summer.

PM: Where's he live? Last summer I spent in SoHo, that was a really good time.

PM: Oh, that's cool. Paul lives in Greenpoint, in Brooklyn. And he lives right over—well, Gerry Leonard, the guitar player? You know Gerry?

PM: Oh, sure, Spooky Ghost.

AC: Yeah.

PM: Yeah, we've covered him before in the mag. [see our review] Yeah, I love him. He's great.

AC: That's the nice thing about being back in the East Coast, because I was in L.A. during the making of my first album. I love the musicians—well, I like them on both coasts. The best part of this whole life is being able to meet so many people.

PM: And although everybody doesn't understand them, one of the greatest parts about being a musician is having a million musicians for friends, because there's nobody like them.

AC: I know. I know.

PM: Okay, they're flaky, immature or self-obsessed in some cases, this or that, but there's nobody like them.

AC: That's right.

PM: I know that you started out with a love for literature at Barnard, and all that stuff.

AC: Right.

PM: Do you write any prose these days?

AC: I haven't, but we're having a reunion at Barnard this year. And there's a group of people in New York called Moth and they're storytellers.

PM: What's it called?

AC: I think their site might be themoth.org. And they're storytellers, Moby did some stuff with them, and Ethan Hawke, but tons of other people, too, that we've never heard of. And they go around in New York and they put on these different shows. And they've asked me to tell a story. And I think I'm going to accept, I have to call her today. So I haven't really been writing, but I think this is a great opportunity to think about a story from my college years and write something. I am still interested in that, but I really haven't been doing much of it, not yet.

PM: Well, I encourage you, write a story and do that. You've been kind to give me so much of your time today. You're very interesting, and a real find as an artist.

AC: I've really enjoyed talking with you, Frank. Thank you for calling. See you in Nashville sometime pretty soon.