

A Conversation with Laura Veirs
by Frank Goodman (6/2007, Puremusic.com)

I was scrambling, I admit, for the right woman for the June issue. I had a lot of feelers out, but too late and nothing was coming back fast enough. So I was excited when I saw that Laura Veirs had a new record out, and overjoyed when I realized that there was a show in Nashville only days away; an amazing coincidence, the overall timing considered. We are very enamored of the artist's music, right from the first recording on out, without exception.

I showed up very early, anticipating a crowd and in need of the best seat, since I wanted to shoot some guerrilla video. (In this case, my little Panasonic GS250, a very small 3 chip camcorder.) I was very fortunate to arrive halfway through soundcheck, so that they got used to me being invisibly there. Laura and I talked a little bit, she was very gracious and warm; I'd interviewed her a year or two ago, but we'd never met. And her producer/drummer Tucker Martine and I had exchanged a couple of emails years ago, after he masterminded the cult classic *Mount Analog*; I'd had the notion at the time of doing a series of interviews with producers nationally (including suspects like himself in the Northwest, Brad Jones in Nashville, Gurf Morlix in Austin, Jimi Zhivago in NYC, Joe Henry in L.A., the Hi-N-Dry crew in Boston, etc.) but that time has still not come around, just not enough hours in the day.

The show was immensely satisfying. The new songs were top shelf, and the chemistry of the players so audiovisible, palpable. I really got to appreciate the musicality of Tucker, of Karl Blau on bass and guitar, and Steve Morrow on Wurlitzer, all terrific players listening very hard.

Laura herself is a fine guitarist, and her parts are very instrumental in the arrangements. Passages played on nylon string on the record were played live on a Les Paul with equal authority and facility, she's just a strong player.

Buy *Saltbreakers*, it's great. (We did, even though we were doing an interview.) Don't download it for free, don't get your friend to burn it for you for free. If the artists of the world are going to survive and keep writing and recording and touring, they have to make money to survive.

And now, a conversation with one of the most interesting and original pop songwriters out there: Laura Veirs.

Puremusic: That was a really, really great show in Nashville the other night at the Basement. The Saltbreakers are in fine form.

Laura Veirs: Oh, thanks. Yeah, they're a great band.

PM: And the CD [*Saltbreakers*], I think it's the best of a great lot.

LV: Oh, that's really nice to hear. Thanks for saying that.

PM: You and I were talking a little bit that night about how everybody has their favorites inevitably, but I think it's really clear that not only the songwriting keeps evolving, but the playing and the chemistry keeps evolving. And it's very clear to me on this record, as I'm sure it is to you.

LV: Well, I always like to feel like my most recent one is the best. I think it feels very defeating if you feel like you haven't done your best work in your current days.

PM: Right.

LV: I've never had that experience, but I'm sure that if I did feel that way I probably wouldn't put the record out because I would want it to be what I felt was my best work, of course.

PM: Yeah.

LV: But it is a bit tough when people come up and say, "You missed the mark on this one, but good job on *Year of Meteors*," "I loved *Carbon Glacier*, but I don't know about *Saltbreakers*"--it's a little tough. But at the same time, you just have to get a thick skin in this business, because someone is always coming up with something that they want to say that's not necessarily what I want to hear, like right after the show. I mean, they say--like in Europe, in particular, they're very straightforward with their commentary.

PM: To say the least.

LV: Like, "I'm so sad about your show. Why didn't you play 'Snow Camping'?"

[laughter]

LV: I'm sorry, I can't play every song of every record. And they didn't even request it, but that's beside the point. My point is it's great when people appreciate the new work, because that's what we're most excited about.

PM: Right. But the other thing is that, hey, if you want to hear it really bad, just yell it out, will you? We'll see if we can do it.

[laughter]

LV: Yeah.

PM: Aside from being very unique and very good, I mean, you're very lucky, right, to have such an interesting band of players, these guys!

LV: Oh, yeah. They are really the cream of the crop, and I feel very lucky, like you said, yes, to have them around.

PM: Are they at arms length at the moment?

LV: Yes.

PM: Okay. Well, I won't worry about embarrassing them a little, and we'll talk about them.

LV: Sure.

PM: Let's talk about drummer extraordinaire and producer Tucker Martine first. What an unusual brainy kind of emotive producer drummer you have in him.

LV: Oh, yeah. He's just amazing. He's really fun to make records with, and he's a really patient guy, and just really charismatic and personable, so people just love to make records with him. He's also a great drummer, and I think that's one of his maybe a little underappreciated things. I think people don't know as much about his drumming as they do about his production. But I think they're equally good.

PM: I agree. Live, as well as the studio, he's an impeccable percussionist. I mean, he's really rock solid/creative, just split right down the middle. I just love him.

LV: Yeah. He's got a great feel, but also he just never makes mistakes. And I mean, I always make mistakes at the show, but I almost never hear him make a mistake. And it's not to say that that's what I need in my band, but he just doesn't do it, and I always find that really incredible.

PM: It's true, yeah, because it's so easy to make mistakes, I mean, come on.

LV: Yeah. He's very focused in the moment.

PM: Tucker being an actual Nashvillian--and God knows they're rare enough--it was a kick meeting his songwriter dad, Layng Martine.

LV: Yeah, Layng is a kick. He's a really funny guy.

PM: And you were saying that night that he's had quite a number of cuts in his career, and that's an interesting legacy. And in the small world category, it was even stranger for me that this other guy also named Layng that I'd met at a very small dinner party that week, turned out to be his brother.

LV: And you were at the dinner party?

PM: Yeah. I was at the dinner party, and I was hanging out with this guy Layng, and then I see him at the show, and say, "Hey Layng, what's up?" And I think, wait a minute, now he's sitting with another guy named Layng. They can't both be called Layng. And then it came out that it was Tucker's brother, and it was just one of those small world moments.

LV: Yeah, for sure. There are three brothers, and Layng, the oldest one, lives in Nashville, and just moved back there from New York. They all grew up there. And then Mac, the youngest one, actually just moved to Portland, where Tucker lives.

PM: [laughs] Yeah, really, to become further enmeshed, right. It's a small world.

LV: But they're all in music of some kind. It's a musical family.

PM: Wow.

And the larger-than-life Karl Blau on bass and guitar, a very strong but gentle presence; what a great musician he is.

LV: Yeah. He's made quite a name for himself around the world, as a solo act.

PM: Oh, really? See, that I don't know.

LV: Yeah. He's got an incredible vast catalog of music that he's made.

PM: Oh, in a solo way?

LV: Yeah. It's under his name, Karl Blau, it's on K Records. You can find out also about his more recent project called Kelp Lunacy, kelplunacy.com, or kelpmonthly.com, I guess he changed the name. Anyway, it's at kelpmonthly.com, you can find out about all of these CDs he's made. For a while he was making one a month.

PM: [laughs]

LV: And some of them very avant-garde and out there, and some of them are very strong pop songwriting, and everything in between. He does collaborations with all kinds of people in the Northwest, and is totally prolific. It's a wonder that he can tour with us, because he's got a family, and it's amazing that he can make the time to do this while he's really in demand for his solo work as well.

PM: I'm going to have to get with Karl on his own tunes, see if we can't feature some of his kelpmonthly and some of these releases in Puremusic, and get some people turned onto all the great stuff he's doing.

LV: Yeah. He's a very influential songwriter, and he also does great recordings, and has done lots of stuff basically on four-track. That used to be his main method for recording. Now he does eight-track.

PM: Eight-track reel-to-reel?

LV: Tape, yeah.

PM: Yeah. Like old Teac machines and stuff?

LV: Yep.

PM: Wow. And this show, in particular, I was very taken with the contribution of Steve Moore on keyboard. I guess it was mostly Wurlitzer. Does he also do projects or music on his own apart from the Saltbreakers?

LV: Yes, he does. He does his own project Stebmo.com, which is basically the website for his solo record--not solo, they're under his name, but collaborative jazz compositions in one place. And he has another record, which is more kind of instrumental beats and crazy sounds, more like Fourtet, if you've heard them.

PM: Uh-huh. [Tucker adds in an email that he thinks Steve has called it Casio dub jazz.]

LV: But yes, he's really doing a great job with his own music, and also collaborating with all kinds of people all the time. He's basically always on tour. And he also tours with Earth/SunnO))), which are those sort of black metal bands out of Seattle.

PM: No, I don't know them.

LV: So those are his side projects. He also plays in sort of a jazz jam type band, Skerrik's Syncopated--what is it, a sextet? Quintet? I don't know. This guy Skerrik, he's a really great saxophone player and bandleader. So Steve has like infinite projects going on all the once. And basically that's the thing about this band is everybody is just totally prolific and energetic, and really pushing themselves to always be doing something musical. Everybody in this band--more so than me, they're all just psychotic music fans, and they just are constantly taking in music and learning about new stuff, and turning each other on to new stuff, and buying records at weird obscure shops on tour, and it's just nonstop.

PM: Wow, it's a beautiful thing. And it's really not that common for road musicians to be that obsessed with it, and in so many bands, and into so much new music. It's very admirable.

LV: Oh, yeah. They're really good people to have around.

PM: And before we leave the subject of people, per se, I really enjoyed the opening act from Olympia that you took on the road, Lake.

LV: Yeah. Aren't they cool? They're just kind of in a way starting out. I mean, they're all experienced musicians in their own way, but they haven't done a lot of touring as that band, Lake.

PM: Right.

LV: I think that when we played in Chicago they said that that was their first club date ever, and that was the first date on this tour.

PM: Wow.

LV: They've just done house concerts basically, like house shows at punk houses around the country. They've already toured a couple times, but really underground. So it was fun for them to see how, as they said, "the other half tours."

PM: [laughs]

LV: But they're really amazing quality players and songwriters. And I think in a way they're a bit still finding their voices, or something like that. There's a tentativeness there that also is reminiscent of, in general, the Northwest--there's this aesthetic there that's more about not being polished?

PM: Wow.

LV: So I don't think that being polished is a part of maybe their aspirations, but if you listen to the songwriting--

PM: Oh, there's a lot of talent there.

LV: There is. It's just incredible. I'm very inspired to see them.

PM: That's very interesting how you describe it, that that's part of the Northwest aesthetic, to not be polished.

LV: Yeah, it definitely is.

PM: Yeah, because I don't think we have any bands in Nashville that resemble that band--not that I'm aware of, and I'm a bit of a club shark.

LV: Not in the Northwest, either. I think they're just real unique. I haven't heard a band like that before. So it's not just that they're from the Northwest and everyone is like that. I think they are really unique in their own right. But they do, in my opinion, follow the norm of being really laid back and not really about putting on a show. I mean, in a way they're putting on an incredible show, but they're not trying to put on a show.

PM: I was given a few cassettes by Andrew for his cassette label [laughs] called Brown Interiour Music. I didn't know there was such a thing as a cassette label.

LV: Yeah. That kind of fits with the Olympia thing. It's very DIY, do-it-yourself, it's very underground and community based, and not particularly, from what I can tell, ambitious.

PM: Right. I hadn't played a cassette in so long I had to dig through my storage locker on the other side of town this morning to find a cassette player so I could review it.

LV: That's good. Did you actually listen?

PM: I haven't yet. But I've got the cassette player now, and I'm going to listen in the afternoon and review it in the same issue that we cover this interview.

LV: Oh, good. Any press that Lake and their members can get is wonderful because they really have a lot of offer, and they're just totally unknown.

PM: I thought it was pretty cool how the members all switched instruments every song; a multi-faceted personality on the one hand, and kind of pleasantly schizophrenic on the other.

LV: Well, and the thing that I find interesting there is that they're all really good on their instruments, all the instruments. It's not like there's one person that's weak on this, or weak on that, they're all just really good on all the instruments. And I find that they're just really bold, actually, really brave, and obviously very adept. I mean, they're just great musicians.

PM: Usually the opener is nothing too inspiring, and that was not the case the other night. I thought that they were really just fantastic.

LV: Oh, good. I'm glad that you appreciated them. I think in some cases their greenness puts people off, like people don't take them seriously--I've noticed on these shows--but when people do give them a chance, they can reap the rewards of really listening.

PM: Absolutely. [Find out a bit more about Lake in our review in this issue.]

I thought that was pretty ingenious that your band took the Nudie suit idea and had your own custom stage clothes made more in your style.

LV: Yeah, that was a really fun thing to do. It has kind of pulled us all together in a funny way that you wouldn't expect. It's become this fun ritual to put on the suits before the show. We just all feel really like we look good in them. And we normally just feel like these grubby wasted exhausted musicians climbing onto the stage.

[laughter]

LV: Because it's hard to tour all the time, it's very tiring. But when we put the suits on it kind of takes us into that other realm of, oh, yeah, this is a special thing. We're on this special tour, and there's people who have made it their priority to hear us tonight, so let's put on a good show. It kind of gets you more in that mind frame.

PM: Absolutely. And I know how many thousands of dollars those Manuel suits cost. So how did you guys make out in that department, when you took the idea and had it made by probably some of your friends in the Northwest? Were they very pricey, or not so bad?

LV: No, not at all. I think each one, including labor, cost about \$175.

PM: Really?

LV: Yeah.

PM: Oh, you can pay \$5,000 for a Manuel suit. I mean, you can pay a lot of money.

LV: Basically, we got the suits for cheap at a vintage store, and then our friend did the work for pretty cheap, too. We probably should have paid her more, but she was just starting off, so we didn't even know what she could do. And she did a great job, because they're really holding up.

PM: So she didn't make the suits. You bought the suits cheap, and then you had her, what--is it all embroidery?

LV: Yeah. It's applique and embroidery, both.

PM: Should we plug the person that made your suits? Is it that kind of a thing?

LV: Yes. Clarity Miller, with Blackbirdfashion.com.

PM: Good. I love plugging talented people.

LV: She's great. And she's a self-employed designer and seamstress, and she lives in this village in Anacortes, Washington. We've been dropping her name a lot--hopefully that will bring her more business.

PM: That's great. I was just in Bangkok for a couple of weeks, and I had some great suits made there. I think I'm going to send my tailor a few pictures of these Nudie suits--

LV: Oh, yeah.

PM: --and see if we can get a little something going.

LV: You should send them to Clarity, send your new suits to Clarity.

PM: Oh, yeah, right, we should do that, too. Okay.

LV: Yeah.

PM: Your songs are always great, but I think this is a very special batch of songs, more emotional without being angsty.

LV: Uh-huh.

PM: I don't include you, but a lot of people can't get emotional without getting angsty, is what I mean.

LV: Yeah, right. I can see that. That's kind of an easier way to go about things, I guess. It's just there. Angst is always there, so it's easy to talk about it. I try to find other ways to talk about complex emotions rather than just dwelling on the dark side.

PM: Right. Or just staying kind of in the personal emotional realm, yeah, you find other ways to get to that subject.

LV: Yeah.

PM: What's afoot in your life that fueled this batch of songs?

LV: Oh, you've probably read about it. I went through a lot of personal changes, and I kind of don't want to talk about them anymore, because I'm just like kind of exhausted by it. But I went through a big breakup, and got together with someone new. And that's the foundation of this record.

PM: Good for you. But I would like to talk about your move from Seattle to Portland, which is more my kind of town.

LV: Yeah. It's a neat town.

PM: How is that treating you?

LV: It's fun. I've been on tour so much since I moved there that I haven't really felt the, like, core of the city yet. I don't really know all the different neighborhoods yet. But I do know my neighborhood, which is in the northeast part of town.

PM: That's the cool part, right, the northeast?

LV: Well, southeast is really the hipster, more hip cool part, and northeast is like the next up and coming cool part, I guess.

PM: I see.

LV: But southeast is traditionally, I guess, for a longer period, it has been the place where all the artists live. But I think that it became too expensive, like it always happens, so people started moving to the northeast. It's so funny, because it's a tiny town. I mean, it is a city, but people really do stay to their neighborhood, and that's kind of interesting. Like I was talking with Khaela from The Blow--I don't know if you know that band, but--

PM: I don't yet, but I will.

LV: She lives in the southeast, and I told her I was moving to Portland, and she's like, "Where are you moving?" And I was like, "Northeast." She was like, "Oh, I'll never see you."

PM: [laughs]

LV: Because people just don't really go--they have everything they need in each neighborhood, really. I mean, you can walk, basically. It's a very walk-friendly and bike-friendly town, so you can basically just get around without a car. I don't have a car. Anyway, the point is that it's still new to me, very new. And I really like it, but I honestly haven't really been there for more than a month at a time. And it was rainy when I moved there. I moved there in November, so it's harder to get out and about when it's raining all the time.

PM: Portland has that all over Nashville, which is not really a walking or a bike-friendly atmosphere. And that really makes a town, I think.

LV: Oh, it does. It's very much more European in that way. I mean, that's why I love to go to Europe because everyone is walking everywhere. You kind of have to walk, because the streets are too narrow to have a car, or you can never find parking. It's just really set up for pedestrians, which I think is one reason why there isn't such an obesity problem there, because people are forced to walk.

PM: Right. And in Europe, bike lanes are everywhere.

LV: We love going to Holland, because they're crazy for bikes there. And they have like bike lanes that go underneath the highways, roundabouts. I mean, they've got bike lanes that are separate roads in various places. Of course, bikes dominate in Amsterdam. You really have to be aware when you're crossing a street there, because the bikes will just mow you down. That's how they go. The bikes control the thing, and that's great.

PM: Bikes rule.

LV: Yeah. You'll find moms with four kids on a bike, one bike. They just have a way of doing it that makes it look so effortless.

PM: I'll tell you one town I didn't like biking in was Shanghai.

LV: I've biked in China because I lived there for a year. But I was there about--well, I'm sure it was terribly crowded then. I found it really interesting in Beijing. There was this flow that happened in the bike world, like--

PM: A sea of bicycles.

LV: Oh, yeah. It's like this river. And you just get in and out of the roundabout, just like a little drop of water would in a river. It was fascinating. But what happened to you in Shanghai?

PM: Oh, it's just the traffic is so scary, there's so many things coming from so many directions at every instant that you just have to stay so on your game. And then life seems so cheap over there, so if somebody gets hit by a car, well, it's just no big deal. You got to take care of it on your own, because there's no insurance. And the police don't make a big deal about it. It's just another world, as you know.

LV: Oh, yeah. It's much more free like kind of anarchy over there.

[laughter]

PM: So to songwriter friends and aspiring writers, I point to your songs as superior examples of flexibility and a freedom of expression. You seem very unfettered as a writer, to me.

LV: Yeah, so far so good. I haven't really struggled with very many writer's block issues.

PM: Yeah.

LV: Struggled with the performance more. But now I'm finally getting over that. I was so nervous from the beginning. I think I took it too seriously in the wrong way. I don't know, I was just really uptight for the first few years and very anxious about performing. But since I've just worked through that anxiety I've become so much more comfortable. But I didn't start writing songs to perform. I started writing songs to write songs. And that's the hard thing for some songwriters: they realize that in this day and age mostly songwriters become performers--at least in the place where I live, in the Northwest. It's not like Nashville, where you actually have people who are just writers.

PM: Right.

LV: So yeah, the performance was harder to come to for me to feel comfortable. But I really feel more and more so, just relaxed. The writing thing, yeah, I just sit down and stuff comes out. And I have to work on it, but--

PM: But it's kind of a pure approach. Probably because you started writing songs just to write songs, it remained kind of a pure approach, and you just let whatever is coming out come out, and you just nurture it to the end.

LV: I just try to write a lot. I haven't written a song since I wrote my last record, so of course now I'm getting anxious about that. But I have been touring so much, and I moved to a new city, so it's okay.

PM: Yeah. And it will come all in a rush, the way it does.

LV: Yeah, it will, once I make the space and time for it. But yeah, it's fun for me. I really like it. It's a challenge each time to sit down and come up with an interesting song. It's a tough thing to do well, I think. But I find it really enjoyable when it starts to work.

PM: Yeah. I was just talking to a friend who was in the halls of Congress yesterday trying to protect the rights of songwriters and this and that. And he said that Rivers Rutherford, one of the very mega-writers of this town, had been talking to Trent Lott. And you know, Rivers himself is a Republican, and was a supporter of Lott's, and was kind of running down the American songwriters dilemma, and how his rights are being compromised all over the place, and they're trying to protect them. And Lott's basic take on preserving this very American heritage of writing R & B and country and blues was, "Well, maybe y'all just need to be doing something else."

LV: Really?

PM: [laughs]

LV: Basically just change jobs?

PM: Yeah, like maybe you ought to get a real job.

LV: Yeah, maybe you should be a carpenter, or something, with practical skills.

PM: Yeah, really, really sad.

LV: That's like telling like a cobbler to just stop making shoes. You know?

PM: Yeah, right, maybe you should be a mason. Really sad. Do you pay attention to the business stuff at all, like airplay and retail versus bandstand sales, or promotion or any of that? Do you get involved with any of that?

LV: Well, I have a helper. I don't have a proper experienced music business manager. But Clyde is my very dear helper. But so we're kind of in this funny place of trying to pay attention but not knowing exactly what to pay attention to, and asking the label about sales, but not really knowing what that means. And seeing that it's on the college charts and say, "Well, that must be good." But what does that mean?

PM: Right. And who's working it.

LV: Yeah. I mean, I know the name of my radio plugger, and he's really nice. It's very important to me to know what's going on, but there's so much going on that I just can't track it all. So it's kind of trying to decide along the way what is worth asking about and figuring out, and what is just worth letting them do, because that's their job, the label.

PM: Exactly. Yeah. It's hard to know how to insert yourself into the process in a way that they know you're vitally interested, without getting in the way. I dig.

LV: Yeah, exactly.

PM: How is the relationship with Nonesuch going, and are they pleased enough with how it's going?

LV: I don't know if they're pleased enough, because they haven't renewed my contract. But they seem pleased, but not in the sense that they have said, "Okay, let's sign another contract." So my contract is up with them. But they seem optimistically enthusiastic about things.

PM: Good.

LV: So who knows? To be honest, I'm considering all the different options open to me, too. It's a strange world right now to be a musician and try to make money, to make this a business.

PM: Definitely.

LV: It's just changing so fast. Everybody is talking about it. Everybody is trying to figure out how to make it work with the new digital era. So it's interesting to follow things that other people are doing that are completely free of labels altogether. And I'm not saying I'm going to go that route, but I am just taking everything into consideration as I look at the next step, because who knows what's going to happen, for me, and for the record industry at large.

PM: Yeah, because some people are going even beyond the labelless route, and going the productless route, saying, well, I'm not even going to make CDs, I'm just going to be available as downloads, and that's the way it's all going to be in a little while, so I'm just getting to it.

PM: Yeah. There was a really interesting article in the *New York Times* recently about a guy who's just doing just that, and basically selling a song a week online. And he's gotten tons of people interested. And then he'll just take a query and ask people, "Well, where is the most interest?" And they're like, "Over here in this small town in Pennsylvania. Come

play a show." And then he'll go play a show and come home with thousand bucks. And that's great for him. He's a beginning songwriter.

PM: I saw that article. That was very, very interesting.

LV: He doesn't have anybody helping him. I mean, he was lamenting the fact that he's spending his six hours a day on the computer. That's the other thing.

PM: Exactly. Well, that's what happens.

LV: Saying he didn't get into songwriting to sit on the computer talking to fans.

PM: Right. And then instead of having a radio promotion guy, you have a person that does that six hours on the computer for you.

LV: Right. Unless it's you. I mean, he was doing it, in the case of that guy. He was writing the songs and talking to the fans six hours a day, and doing all the promotion, etc. It just sounds exhausting.

PM: More and more I hear people say stuff like, "Put down that mouse and pick up your guitar."

LV: Yeah, right.

PM: Because people are spending so much time--

LV: You mean, like networking and just hanging out on myspace and--

PM: Right. Even research and doing constructive things on the computer. But musicians, more and more, are saying to each other, "Dude, put down that mouse and pick up your guitar."

LV: Yeah.

PM: Because it just wraps up your whole day if you let it.

LV: Oh, it will. It's amazing. I've noticed that, like myself, just checking e-mail, I'll sit down and think, oh, I'll just check my e-mail. And then I'm there for like two hours.

PM: Yep.

LV: I didn't even notice the time go by.

PM: Yeah. And you have a good time. You're creative, but still, you could have been playing.

LV: Yeah, right.

PM: Do you go in for any hobbies when you're off the road?

LV: Yeah. I like to garden. I like to do landscaping and gardening. I like to cook and have friends over, and yoga, just really kind of nesty type home oriented things, because I'm not home that much. So when I am home, I just want to be home, like with a capital H. You know?

PM: Absolutely. So when you're in the van, are you guys listening to music together, or is everybody on their iPod?

LV: There's usually a couple people on their iPod, but there's always music in the main cabins.

PM: Is there anything playing in the cabin of late that we should note?

LV: Well, there's basically like 50 CDs being played a day.

PM: Ah, really? It's like that.

LV: Yeah. Everyone is always buying stuff, and then there's always people giving us stuff. And then they brought about 500 different CDs. But anyway, here's one, this is a mouthful: Maher Shalal Hash Baz. It's a band from Japan that we like.

PM: Catchy. And they have--sounds like a Middle Eastern name, right?

LV: I know. I don't know the background of the name. But yes, it does sound Middle Eastern. Karl toured with them in Japan recently. They are also affiliated with K Records out of Olympia, and are just really interesting kind of quirky--there's an element of pop, there's an element of avant-garde, there's an element of noise and just weirdness. You should check them out.

PM: And lastly, I want to know if you've read anything interesting lately that turned you around or turned you on?

LV: Yeah. There's a book called *The Motel Life* by Willy Vlautin. He's in that band Richmond Fontaine. Willy's songwriting backs it up, or holds it together. His lyrics are just amazing. And he's a novelist now, too. He was a songwriter for many years and a story writer. He just published his second novel. *The Motel Life* is his first, and I just found it incredibly beautiful. Very stark, in the vein of John Steinbeck, very stark, very minimalist and down-to-earth, and just people stories, very much like a normal person's story.

PM: Fantastic. We're going to go get it and review it.

LV: And then there's another one that actually Willy recommended that I really love, I just finished it the other day, *Electric Michelangelo* by Sarah Hall. She's British, but she lives in North Carolina, and she's a young writer, and she's incredible. It's amazing to me what people can do. And she's only 30 years old. I mean, she just wrote this incredible book that to me feels like something that someone would have written in their prime at 60 or something. She's amazing.

PM: Well, as always, you're just a very interesting artist and conversationalist. I'm grateful for your time.

LV: Well, thanks, Frank. It was really nice to see you at the show the other night, and I'm glad you got to meet the whole Martine family.

PM: Yeah, it was really a kick. And the band was just fantastic. And please send fond regards around the van for me.

LV: I will. Thanks for calling.

PM: Okay, Laura. Take care.