

**A Conversation with Annabelle Chvostek**  
**by Frank Goodman (9/2006, Puremusic.com)**

Puremusic readers may be well aware that we were very big on the debut of this Canadian supagrupe, originally composed of Ruth Moody (who came from Scruj McDuhk, forerunner of The Duhks) and singer songwriters Nicky Mehta and Cara Luft. *40 Days* ended up with the Juno for Best Folk recording. So, like any fan and the group members themselves, no doubt, everyone wondered what the fate of The Wailin' Jennys was, after it was known that Cara Luft (who among other things was the hot guitar player in the trio) was leaving to pursue her solo career.

Through many channels and avenues, a search for a suitable replacement began, and this is one of many topics I take up with the newest member of the band, the keenly talented Annabelle Chvostek. Not from Winnipeg like her bandmates, Annabelle is originally from Toronto, and moved to Montreal some years back. Check out some of her previous solo releases on iTunes and you will hear the jazzier and edgier influences she brings to the table, by which the trio is well served. In fact, Annabelle's song "The Devil's Paintbrush Road" opens the new record *Firecracker* with an unmistakable strength and a new voice.

Having interviewed the elegant and engaging Nicky Mehta on our first pass, it was just like us to want a go at the new member of the group, and we're grateful to our friend Jill Brooksbank at Mainstage Mgt. in Vancouver for hooking us up. Hope to get out that way in the Fall, and we'll post some photos or video clips if we do.

Like their paisans Blackie and the Rodeo Kings, The Wailin' Jennys are far more than the sum of their very significant parts, and no credible counterpart for either act in the States comes to mind. Both are very popular in their own country, and are slowly but surely gaining a wide and devoted following in the U.S. Don't even think about missing the Wailin' Jennys when they come to your town. And after you enjoy the conversation with the alluring Ms. Chvostek, check out the mighty clips on the Listen page and buy *Firecracker*.

**Puremusic:** First, let me say that I doubt that a better folk CD than *Firecracker* is going to emerge from your country or mine this year.

**Annabelle Chvostek:** Oh, wow, thank you. That's a huge compliment.

**PM:** Yeah, it is, because we know how many records are coming out. And I loved *Forty Days*. I was a very big fan of *Forty Days*, but I think this is an even better record.

**AC:** Oh, well, thank you.

**PM:** It's always apples and oranges, of course, but I mean, we're very into the Wailin' Jennys at Puremusic. We've reviewed the last couple, and interviewed Nicky Mehta after *Forty Days* came out.

So, if you'll indulge me, I'm really interested as a deep fan of the group, how they made this difficult transition so providentially. Be so kind as to take me through how Nicky and Ruth actually found you, and how it all came together.

**AC:** Sure. Well--

**PM:** You know I asked specifically to speak to you.

**AC:** I got that message from Jill, so it's great.

**PM:** Good.

**AC:** Well, I got a call from them when I was sort of on tour in Montreal last summer, doing the solo thing. And they had heard about me. I had heard actually that they had lost one of their members, and I didn't know what was going to happen. We're all songwriters on the scene, so I knew who they were--

**PM:** Of course.

**AC:** --and I had actually run into them in Nashville, of all places, at the Folk Alliance Conference. I didn't meet them officially at that point, but sort of saw them do a showcase, and so on. And I had friends who had opened for them in Victoria, so I'd seen them play as well. I had a good idea of who they were, and how professional they were. So they called me up and said that they were looking for someone. They called a whole pile of Canadian songwriters who they thought might fit the bill. But they apparently had a pretty good feeling about me from the beginning. They had sort of called some other peers of ours, Trish from the Be Good Tanyas, she has another band called--I don't know if you know that band, but--

**PM:** Po' Girl, yeah.

**AC:** Yeah, exactly.

**PM:** I've interviewed the Tanyas, too.

**AC:** Right. As a solo artist, I'd opened up for them, and we'd hung out a bit. So she'd thought about it and was like, "You know, Annabelle could do it."

**PM:** Wow.

**AC:** "You should definitely go for Annabelle." So they heard that from her, and she's someone that everyone in this scene respects. And then our producer, David Travers-

Smith, had also done web searches for people, and came across me on the web, and had told the girls about me through that. So they had a few different people, and heard about me from a few different sources. So they had a pretty good feeling.

And yeah, I was just at a point where--they had this opportunity for me to jump on board on tour. I didn't have anything booked for that period of time, and I didn't know what it would lead to, really. So they called me up, and I went to Toronto to meet them. We had breakfast [laughs] and we did some singing together.

**PM:** Was that nerve wracking, or was it cool, or--

**AC:** Well, it was both. It was kind of like--

**PM:** It's a lot of pressure, really, you know?

**AC:** Yeah, I mean, I was like, "Wow, I never thought that I would do something like this." So there was part of me that was like, "Well, I have these plans as a solo artist, and this will be a total switch." So I was sort of like, "Wow, this is an amazing opportunity, I really want to do this," and also like, "Hmm, what is this thing? I don't know if this fits into my plans."

**PM:** Right. "I got all these plans for myself. On the other hand, these women have dates all over the world..."

**AC:** Yeah. And that was a lovely thing. Also they actually had a team that I could--our manager, Jack, I had sort of developed a relationship with him through festival distribution, and was keen on working with him even before knowing the band. So it was just like, "This just makes sense." And so we met. They called me a week later, and were like, "Do you want to join our band?" [laughs] They had a think about it, but they--well, they even called me that night after they got together, and it was like, "We haven't heard a blend like this before." It was just all very positive.

**PM:** Wow. "Do you want to join our band?"

**AC:** Yeah.

**PM:** That's so great.

**AC:** And at that point, I had met them, and listened to the music a lot, and had a good experience of singing with them, and it was just like, "Gosh, now I really want to do it, so please call me fast." And then they did. And it was like, "Okay. Let's go."

**PM:** Wow.

**AC:** So within a couple of weeks I was in Winnipeg, and we were doing this two-week crash rehearsal period where I was learning all the material. And we were having these

crazy, long, sixteen-hour rehearsals and stuff. [laughs] But there was a lot of good energy there. We laughed a lot. It really was a good thing.

**PM:** It had to be hard to crash all that--cram all that vocal arrangement stuff and all the words, and all the "Okay, what am I going to play on this song?" I mean, there's so much to join a group like that. The vocal arrangements are so extensive, and you got to come up with new parts.

**AC:** Yeah. It was very intense. But the vocals were always easy, too. Like I mean the words, yeah, it's hard to learn words and stuff. But the actual arranging, it just falls together, really.

**PM:** Really.

**AC:** When we arrange songs, it just happens really naturally. So that was the magical serendipitous thing. It was like, "Okay, this just works." And it's what people love, and it's easy, it's fun.

**PM:** And it almost had to be that way vocally for them both to go, "Okay, she's the one." That part of it kind of had to come together magically; isn't that so?

**AC:** Yes.

**PM:** Who brought in "Long Time Traveler," for instance, the a capella traditional song?

**AC:** Ruth brought that one in.

**PM:** Did that take some arranging, or did that just kind of fall together like, "Well, I sing in this register, so I'll be doing this."

**AC:** It was sort of a mixture. It was basically us trying it out. We actually worked it out in our touring van. [laughs] That was one that we worked out. We started working on it last winter when we were touring around England. And we'd just sit around and try things out, and run by different ideas with each other. It just sort of made sense where our voices would fall. But then, at the same time, we have choices. So we try a few different things out and see what everybody thinks or feels about it, and then sort of figured out how we wanted to build it. And then we started performing it a bit, and then it changed a bit after that, and then we recorded it. So it is an organic process. It doesn't just happen, but it's a joy to kind of figure it out. When we're doing that a capella stuff, we can just be driving through the mountains or something, and singing.

[laughter]

**AC:** And we just work it out that way.

**PM:** Wow. So how long was it from the time you kind of came on the gigging or rehearsing scene with them, before you were actually in the studio?

**AC:** Well, we made an initial demo kind of thing, sort of for the presenters and for people on the scene, to say like, "Okay, the Jennys have a new lineup, but it's going to be okay."

[laughter]

**AC:** "She can actually sing and write songs. It's all right." So we did an initial recording of "Swallow" and "Devil's Paintbrush Road."

**PM:** Oh, so you demoed two of your songs.

**AC:** Yeah, early on, for just something--

**PM:** For the "we're okay" demo, you used your songs. That's interesting.

**AC:** Yeah. And that was early. I know we were working on some stuff in January, I mean, like right after I joined. But I don't think we ended up using that. And I don't know, shortly, a few months later, we'd figured out our arrangement to "Swallow" and had something going on with "Devils." And we worked with David really soon after that. And in fact, that initial demo, we kept that version of "Swallow," so that's the one that shows up on the album.

**PM:** It's the actual one.

**AC:** Yeah. "Devils" we redid, but "Swallow" just was--it just happened magically, and it just felt right. So that happened just a few months after we started working together.

**PM:** So I was just up in Guelph for the Hillside Festival.

**AC:** Mmm, great.

**PM:** That was really, really a great little festival. Because we're big fans of the whole Canadian music scene, which is too wide to really get one's hands around, though we keep trying. I know that you're originally from Toronto, right?

**AC:** Uh-huh.

**PM:** And now, for many years, Montreal.

**AC:** Yes.

**PM:** So isn't that kind of essentially different than being from Winnipeg, where I think the other two women are from? Are they both from Winnipeg?

**AC:** Yeah, they were both born and raised in Winnipeg.

**PM:** Is that like being "Well, I'm a city girl, and they're more country girls"? Or is it not that cut and dried?

**AC:** No. I mean, Winnipeg is a big Canadian city. And it's got an amazing cultural scene. It's not a huge city, like it's not as big as Toronto or Vancouver.

**PM:** But it's a big city and a big cultural hub.

**AC:** Yes. And they have a great ballet and symphony there, and all those kind of things. And they've got a really interesting art scene. And of course, it's really central to the roots music scene in Canada. I think some of the best musicians are coming out of there. And I don't know how it works, but it's just like--maybe it's the influence of the Winnipeg Folk Festival, which has brought so many people up, and people have just grown up with that. It spawned this amazing bunch of musicians who are really good and really solid, excellent players and really creative songwriters. Yeah, so it's the place to be for kind of folk roots stuff.

I had all kinds of influences, from growing up in Toronto, which is very multicultural, and then Montreal is that way, too, and also has this whole French culture and mix of cultures, which is really exciting and fun. So that's sort of a different influence. I guess we kind of come from different worlds, but they fit well together. And we inspire each other and introduce each other to different kinds of music.

**PM:** Wow. So Nicky and Ruth both cut solo records before they formed the Jennys, right? And Ruth--

**AC:** Oh, yeah, I guess Ruth had put out an EP. But she was more touring with a band.

**PM:** She'd done the Scruj MacDuhk thing.

**AC:** Yeah.

**PM:** But you, on the other hand, had a more jazz-inflected, kind of cabaret/improv, more artsy background--is that a fair reading of it?

**AC:** Yeah. My background was kind of all over the place. And then before I joined the Jennys, for the last few years before that, I had gotten really into jamming with my buddies, doing sort of more old-time country kind of stuff. But I had definitely come from quite a diverse background, and put out a couple of records, and one of them was quite jazzy. [laughs] And yeah, there was never one specific genre, really, it was sort of drawing from all kinds of sources.

**PM:** And you were doing some writing for theater or dance companies, and stuff like that?

**AC:** Yeah, sort of working with a lot of different art forms and new media artists, and contemporary choreographers, and stuff like that. So yeah, it was all across the board.

**PM:** Let me back up further, and ask what kind of a home and a family you grew up in, and what you were like in your early years, as a young girl, in school.

**AC:** Well, I mean, music was sort of the pastime, or hobby, or joy of my family. Everybody played. My mom had a huge repertoire of folk songs, a lot of Canadian folk songs, and British ones, and American ones as well. So she was constantly singing. There were always musical instruments around. My dad played mandolin and fiddle.

**PM:** Wow.

**AC:** They were professionals in the media as well. That was their professional life. My mom is a journalist. My dad was a television producer, retired now. But he still does photography.

**PM:** Wow.

**AC:** Yeah. But our idea of a good time was to have a bunch of people over and sit around and sing songs. So that was--

**PM:** What a cool family. [laughs]

**AC:** Yeah. And then, of course, they were really encouraging to my brother and I to pick up instruments--to take lessons, and take classical lessons. So I picked up the fiddle when I was quite young--well, the *violin*, I guess you would call it.

[laughter]

**AC:** Because I wanted to emulate my dad. And then I started taking lessons. And then my brother and I were both in the Canadian Children's Opera Chorus when we were very young, and that was a whole incredible experience of singing choral music, and as well, getting a chance to be in these huge productions at the Opera House in Toronto, and get to be inches away from these Grand Dames of opera, and hear their voices, and just sort of bask in that hugeness of sound that opera is.

**PM:** Wow.

**AC:** So that sort of infused me with a lot of incredible music. And also I got a love of being in front of people and the whole production--getting ready to go on, and the buzz of just being in front of people. So that started really early.

**PM:** What a unique preparation for singing in this kind of a trio as a grownup. That's amazing, to have in your background that level of ensemble singing as a child.

**AC:** Yes. I was singing the lower of the three parts in the Canadian Children's Opera Chorus from the age of 8 to 16. So I really developed a sense of finding the lower harmony in all kinds of music from opera to more contemporary material, and arrangements of songs. We always had a Christmas concert, for instance. That was definitely a firm foundation for me--that was really my life from my childhood. So I think that's what made it so natural for me to just jump into the lower register of the Wailin' Jennys. It was like, "This is easy. I know how to do this."

**PM:** Right.

**AC:** And it's fun, and it's different, because we get to arrange everybody's original songs, and it's a different genre. But still that foundation is there.

**PM:** Sure. I mean, like Coltrane said, "There's only twelve notes."

**AC:** Yeah.

**PM:** It all serves the other. Is your brother still playing? Is he a musician today?

**AC:** No, he's not. We'll still sing together sometimes when we have family gatherings. He's got a beautiful bass voice. And he was actually really good at the French horn. But no, he was also always fascinated by the internal workings of computers from a very young age. So he's sort of one of these like crazy geniuses with the computer, and was from a very young time. He's fully wrapped up in computer world, actually, which is interesting. He's a programmer.

**PM:** Wow.

Let's talk a little about "Devil's Paintbrush Road", the crucial opening song from *Firecracker*, which literally launches the record. It's really interesting that your mandolin part is intact from the earlier version on your *Burn My Ass* EP, which--

[laughter]

**PM:** When I checked that out, I thought "Wow, the new chick in the Jennys has a EP out that's called *Burn My Ass*. That's pretty wild. This oughta be interesting..."

[laughter]

**AC:** Yeah. There are some days that I regret calling it that. But there are as many times where I just like it because it's funny.



**PM:** It's fantastic. I think it's really funny. So the mandolin part is still intact from that early version, which really, to me, pointed up the genius of Nicky's harp playing, especially that recurring bluesy line.

**AC:** Yeah.

**PM:** That is a harp doing that line, right?

**AC:** Yeah, that's harmonica.

**PM:** That's kind of saxophone-like.

**AC:** Uh-huh.

**PM:** And Ruth's fantastic banjo on that cut, and Kevin Breit's dobro--

**AC:** Yeah.

**PM:** --and the rhythm section. I mean, it's amazing, all that the song became. It's a great song to begin with, of course--but all that it became on this record is a real testament to the overall effort. It's kind of a microcosm of all that's to come on the record.

**AC:** Yeah.

**PM:** A meeting of the greatest elements appear right in that song, right at the top. So that had to be some kind of a small revelation to see your song come to that particular life on this record, right?

**AC:** Absolutely. In fact, I'm plucking on a fiddle, I'm not actually playing a mandolin.

**PM:** Oh, a fiddle?

**AC:** I'm holding it like a mandolin, and I'm just plucking.

**PM:** No kidding.

**AC:** Yeah, I mean, I started writing the music for that when I was on a camping trip, and all I had with me was a crappy old fiddle, so--

**PM:** You mean there's no mandolin on that cut?

**AC:** No. I mean, I'm plucking it. I'm playing the fiddle like a mandolin.

**PM:** That's totally cool.

**AC:** Yeah.

**PM:** What about on *Burn My Ass*? Are you playing on the mandolin or the fiddle?

**AC:** Yeah, no, it's a fiddle, yeah, plucking my fiddle.

**PM:** That's amazing.

**AC:** Yeah. It's a slightly different timbre than the mandolin, but it's really--

**PM:** I thought it was awfully throaty. That's totally cool. Now, you're plucking it with your fingers, not using any kind of a plectrum, right?

**AC:** I'm just wailing away with my hand, yep. But you're right--when I got back and listened to the *Burn My Ass* version of it--I have a couple of times since the new one came out--it really is an incredible evolution. Like who would have thunk? Like Mike, who was putting some parts on--Mike Hardwicke from Austin, who we worked with--he was sort of the first one who said to me, "This is a bluegrass tune."

[laughter]

**AC:** I was like, "Wow, really? I guess I wrote a bluegrass tune." And then as all the parts emerged, it was just like, "Oh, my gosh! This is turning into something huge. This is crazy. Like I almost can't handle it..."

But yeah, working with David Travers-Smith was an incredible experience, because he really sort of tuned into who we are and what our potential was, and what the song's potential was, and was really sensitive about that. And he just built everything up so well. It was very exciting for me to work with such a pro, and have it be such a good experience.

**PM:** Oh, yeah. He's a frickin' wizard, that guy.

**AC:** Yeah, yeah.

**PM:** And I want to come back to him. But you just mentioned Mike Hardwick, too. And I was just hanging out with him backstage in New York City. What a great guy and a great player he is.

**AC:** Yeah, yeah, he is. And he was there for our bed sessions. And he was a really important presence, because that was a very intense time. We had basically ten days, which included really intensive rehearsals, and then going into the studio to work stuff out. And he was kind of like the Zen master kind of presence. Like he was just like so laid back and solid, and would just come out with these like very simple and humble words of wisdom that kind of were very grounding for me during that whole intense process.

**PM:** He's one of those like translucent guys, just like, "Oh, right, you're one of those invisible dudes. You're just playing the perfect part, and otherwise you're like, "Where'd he go?"

Yeah, I was in New York, and my close friend and co-writer, Thomm Jutz was playing a gig. He plays guitar with Mary Gauthier, and they were doing this gig with Eliza Gilkyson. So I met Mike backstage; he's a helluva guy.

**AC:** Yeah.

**PM:** How do the Jennys know him?

**AC:** Through Eliza, yeah, because I mean, we all love Eliza.

**PM:** Yeah. What's not to love, right?

**AC:** Yeah. I'd seen her a long time ago at some folk conference or something, and I was just like, "Wow, who's that?" And then we all ended up on the same label, on Red House, in the States.

**PM:** Right.

**AC:** And yeah, and so last summer we were at some festivals together. We're listening to the record, and just loving all the guitars parts that Mike was putting on. And then we got to meet him at like Kenmore Folk Festival and Calgary Folk Festival. And we did a workshop stage with Eliza, and her son Cisco on the drums, and Mike. And at that time we were starting to really workshop the songs and think about what we wanted, and listening to Eliza's recordings, and just sort of digging that vibe, and there he was. [laughs] So we figured, "Okay, let's contact him to do the sessions."

**PM:** Wow.

**AC:** It was really a good choice.

**PM:** Yeah. He played great stuff on your record, too.

**AC:** Yeah. And he's never trying to jump in or show off, ever. He's just trying to lay it down and support, which is so amazing.

**PM:** I mean, if anything, when I saw him in the park in Manhattan with Eliza, I was like, "Is it the sound guy's problem? Is he not turning him up loud enough?" And then I got up closer and said, "No, he's just playing that laid back." If there's a solo, he'll step up a little, and otherwise he's like the part that you don't necessarily hear per se, but that's totally essential.

**AC:** Yeah, exactly.

**PM:** And that's very unusual.

But about that wizard, David Travers-Smith, I don't even know where to begin. The guy has done such an amazing job on the record. And you say that it comes from totally getting the group, and totally getting the songs. But is there any one song, for instance, that comes to mind, how he may have heard one or all of the women just run the tune down, and had an idea about how to approach it? Is there any anecdote around any song that has to do with him hearing the song and saying, "Okay, well, let's do this"? Or was there a studio M.O., like, "Well, we always tracked him with the main songwriter, everybody singing, and the rhythm section"? Was there a certain M.O. in the studio, how you tracked the tunes?

**AC:** Well, he really responded to what we wanted, too. He threw in a lot of ideas. I didn't think that necessarily there would be drums like there are on "Devil's Paintbrush Road." I thought, "Umm, maybe a little train beat on a snare or something like that." And then it's just this huge kabang, kachung!

**PM:** [laughs] Right.

**AC:** And that was also Christian, our drummer; he came up with this huge whacky idea. And I was kind of like, "Well, I don't know about that..." But David was hearing the potential in it. And it changed from that first time we tried to do it all together. He was just like wailing away. And I was like, "How can you even hear anything else?"

[laughter]

**PM:** Who cares.

[laughter]

**AC:** Yeah, yeah. But it transformed, and it mixed in a bit of the train beat, but it almost has a sense of New Orleans brass band kind of vibe within the drums. That's what he was hearing.

We were on tour in Australia for the last stretch of the record production. And he was sending us mixes every single day, and getting other people in, like every day, and trying out parts, and sending us ideas. And we were sending back feedback. And we were not easy to work with, either.

**PM:** Of course not.

**AC:** He came up with a lot of ideas that we were just like--that each individual songwriter really, you know, took to heart, but then things transformed enormously from the time he would present an idea and the actual production. On "Firecracker" as well, I

wanted some like crazy hard guitar on there for some reason, even though it's a sweet song. And he sent me all these different guitar ideas that were kind of lovely and twinkly. And I kept saying, "I need something more aggressive."

[laughter]

**AC:** "Okay. I understand. It's like more male."

[laughter]

**AC:** And so finally it happened, with Kevin Breit playing these really heavy parts on it. And I said, "Okay! You got it!" And he loved it.

[laughter]

**AC:** So things like that: it was a lot of back and forth and a lot of jamming out different ideas, and him connecting with these musicians. Fro instance, I had never met Kevin until after the summer, when I got to say "Hey, thanks for doing that. You got it."

[laughter]

**AC:** Yeah. Kevin is just amazing. He's also one of those players who's so soulful, and so connected. Norah Jones, that's one of his gigs.

**PM:** Sure. He's a monstrous player, that guy.

**AC:** Yeah.

**PM:** We've heard him now on so many great records that I'm happy to be able to ask somebody that's worked with him--even though you weren't there when he got the parts--

**AC:** Yeah.

**PM:** --what's he like personally?

**AC:** Well, my meeting with him was fairly brief, but he's bubbly and funny, and very humble, but full of energy. I saw him do a workshop stage at Winnipeg this summer--it was kind of like the guitar wank workshop where all these guitar players got to just wail away on electrics.

[laughter]

**AC:** He's on fire, that guy.

**PM:** Wow.

On the road, issues and problems of every kind come up. How do the Jennys deal with them? What's the dynamic, or as a trio, how does stuff get worked out?

[laughter]

**PM:** Because you can't get away from it, it comes up.

**AC:** Yeah, right. Well, I think everybody in the band is pretty committed to being peaceable people who are able to look at our own foibles and kind of breathe into the difficulties and try to see how everyone else is feeling, and be sensitive to that. So yeah, I mean, we have discussions if we need to. We have meetings.

**PM:** Yeah. "Band meeting..."

[laughter]

**AC:** "Band meeting!"--yeah, exactly. I think everyone is really committed to making it work, so we're willing to listen to each other when a problem comes up, and try to understand where everyone else is coming from. And every single human being has different needs. But I think we all try to respect each other's needs, even if they're not our own, and understand what they are. I think that's how it works.

**PM:** Yeah. I think that's how it works too. I think guys say it in a different way. But yeah, it makes me wonder what it would be like if women ran the world. It might be good.

[laughter]

**AC:** You never know. It might be nice.

[laughter]

**PM:** Well, maybe someday. I hope I live to see some portion of that.

**AC:** Yeah.

**PM:** So why don't we talk a little bit about the glorious chapter that's come up around *A Prairie Home Companion*, and Garrison Keillor. What's that all about?

**AC:** Well, we got a chance to play a show back in--gosh, when was that? It was kind of early on. We all arrived and had no idea what a big deal it was. And then we're in this beautiful theater in Madison with thousands of people in the audience that are super formal, and we're like, "Oh, my God! What *is* this thing?"

[laughter]

**AC:** I mean, I know my parents were so excited that I was going to be on the show, but I had no idea how huge it was. And then yeah, that got such an amazing response, and it was really fun to work with the whole team there, and the band.

**PM:** I mean, that literally has to sell records in a really traceable way.

**AC:** Yes, it does.

**PM:** Like, "There's the Prairie Home spike right there."

**AC:** Yeah, exactly--especially the television thing that we did recently. It's like, "Oh, look, we're number two on Amazon. What the heck? It's the Dixie Chicks, and then us."

[laughter]

**AC:** It doesn't last very long, but--

**PM:** Yeah, but it's there.

**AC:** Yeah.

[laughter]

**PM:** Wow. So what was the TV thing?

**AC:** Well, I guess this was the fifth opportunity we'd had to be with the crew. We did a tour that was off-air, just with the band--not the band, but the whole crew. And then it ended up at Tanglewood. This was in June, I think. My brain is such a blur at this point, so many places--

**PM:** I can only imagine, a different place every night, for so many nights.

**AC:** It was actually July 1st--July 4th was the celebration. And yeah, we were performing at Tanglewood. It was broadcast on PBS on a show called *Great Performances*. Meryl Streep was there performing as well. So I got to meet her.

**PM:** Did you get hang with her at all, or just get to meet her?

**AC:** Yeah, a little bit. She sat down for dinner with Nicky and I. We were just eating our dinners, and she sat down with us. I was like, "Oh, my God. I don't know what to say."

**PM:** She was nice?

**AC:** Yes, she was lovely, actually. It was great to meet her, even though at first I didn't know what to say.

**PM:** Yeah, well, if you got to get tongue tied around somebody, she's certainly a candidate.

**AC:** "My gosh, you're like the greatest actor in America."

[laughter]

**AC:** Yeah, it was quite amazing. So we did this thing, we did a few songs. We did a little single for Garrison. And we really sort of developed a lovely relationship with that whole crew, his bandleader, and--

**PM:** He's nice, right?

**AC:** Garrison is a really interesting guy, and just such a genius and so funny. And he's one of those people who--he really appreciates what we're doing and gets us in a certain way, and then just pushes us to do things that we didn't think we could. We did the Town Hall thing in New York in December, and we got there two hours before we're on, and he's sort of throwing songs at us to learn. And so I mean, it's just like, "Okay, let's figure it out." And we did. It worked out fine. [laughs]

**PM:** Wow.

**AC:** So it's always, from the minute we arrive, we're on our toes, and just working hard. And then the performance is really exciting. There's always a big crowd, and then you're being transmitted to four or five million people, or whatever it is. The first time we were on the show it was being piped up to some astronaut in a shuttle somewhere. And we're like, "Wow, this is huge."

[laughter]

**AC:** Yeah, but it's a really interesting experience being on that show. It's a lot of fun.

**PM:** Do you consider yourself to be a spiritual person?

**AC:** Yeah, sure.

**PM:** In any particular way?

**AC:** Well, I don't really go along with any regular religion. [laughs]

**PM:** Somehow I knew that.

**AC:** I mean, I think there are teachings within all the religions that are pointing towards what I believe in, in terms of aspiring towards love and compassion in the world, and in the universe. And yeah, so I--



**PM:** That's a beautiful distinction you just made. You said, "love in the world, and in the universe"--you actually went beyond the world. I don't think I've heard anybody say that before. Thank you.

**AC:** It's big. I mean, whatever you call it, God, or the universe, or whatever. But it's just an attempt to acknowledge that there is something huge that we're part of.

**PM:** Indeed.

**AC:** I have to think about the larger scheme--there's so much beauty in this world, and so many people who are amazing and working for peace, and working to help other people out of a sense of unconditional compassion. And then at the same time, there's so much insanity going on in the world that one has to wonder "Okay, there's got to be more than this, because what if this isn't here anymore? What's going to happen then? What happens to all our energy then?" So maybe I have some pretty esoteric ideas of how the universe works.

**PM:** Works for me.

**AC:** There's beauty in all religions, but it gets pretty warped, especially right now with all these wars going on in the name of various gods. That's really not what any of these religions are about.

**PM:** Agreed, and thanks for all that.

**AC:** Yeah.

**PM:** Well, it's an amazing rocket ship that you jumped onto with the Wailin Jennys. One never knows where one's life is going, right?

**AC:** Yep, that's right.

**PM:** But I'm very happy to meet you, and I'm really grateful for your time today. You're just as amazing as I thought you'd be.

**AC:** Oh, well, thank you, Frank. It's a real pleasure to talk with you. Thanks for the interview. It was fun.

