

A Conversation with Amy Rigby by Frank Goodman (Puremusic.com 5/2003)

One of our main missions at Puremusic.com is discovering and proliferating what we feel is good pop music for grownups. Frequently these acts may have a retro sound of one era or another, sometimes several eras in a given record. Because only AAA radio will play a given percentage of these artists, many of them are flying under the radar. Some tour as bands, others make produced records and hit the road as solo artists in singer songwriter type venues, and open up shows or even tours for bands when opportunity knocks.

One of the best and highest profile examples of this is Amy Rigby. If there is a woman out there writing funnier songs than Amy, we want to hear about it. Bittersweet, poignant—sure, she’s all that, too. But as the writer of “Tonight I’m Gonna Give the Drummer Some,” “I Hate Every Bone in Your Body But Mine” and “Are We Ever Gonna Have Sex Again?” she towers above the supposedly funny songwriters we’ve come across, especially the silly or overstated variety. Although she has brilliant and subtle songwriting cohorts in the likes of Bill DeMain, Steve Allen, and Bill Lloyd, she can and mostly does do it all by herself. Consider the first chorus on her new record *Til The Wheels Fall Off* (on Signature Sounds), from the song “Why Do I”:

Why do I pull wings off butterflies
Look for things that hurt my eyes
I kiss the boys but I’m the one who cries
Why do I get off on misery
Loneliness feels good to me
I’m happy when I’m all hung out to dry
Why do I

But when I call her funny, I’m also underselling her, because her keen vision into the fragility and fragmentation of the grownup condition goes beyond that. “Even the Weak Survive” is a scream, but it smarts like the truth, too.

The chick has studio savvy and experience, and she has cooked up a quartet of recording environments (with respective co-producers) including Nashville, New York, and Glasgow, that make for a far reaching and well rounded record, it’s brilliant. At George Bradfute’s Tone Chaparral Studio and Steve Allen’s Blue Planet Studio, combos of bohemian princes laid down some mindbending tracks. Really, people who think Nashville is just cranking out bad Country music don’t understand what’s happening here. Out of town, Richard Barone deftly produced the opening quoted number in NYC, and the big surprise for us was the outtasight trio of songs produced with Davie Scott of The Pearlfishers in Glasgow, Scotland, fantastic...like the spooky wonderful “How People Are”:

What scares me the most
is not how you are
What scares me the most
is how people are
drifting and dreaming of someone like you
lonely and looking for two in love to screw it up

She’s a killer, what can I say. She came to Nashville in the late 90s, after more than twenty years in NYC, where she first came to national attention. She jumped right out there on her first solo record, *Diary of a Mod Housewife* (1996), when *Spin* magazine awarded her “Songwriter of the Year” no less, amongst many other accolades, radio appearances, and national top ten lists. 1998’s *Middlence* brought national tours in front of big acts and a Lilith Fair spot. She rolled on to Nashville and tracked the much lauded *Sugar Tree* record with Brad Jones at Alex the Great Studio,

again to well deserved critical acclaim (see our review). Between that release and the new album, Koch Records put out an anthology called *18 Again* (which a *rollingstone.com* writer called “The Reissue of the Year”). Along with selections from the first three records, it includes one of the classic co-writes from razor sharp foil Bill DeMain, “Keep It to Yourself.”

We’re very interested to see Amy ally herself with Signature Sounds, a great MA singer songwriter label. As far as we know, *Til The Wheels Fall Off* marks their first foray into a more pop or rock arena, and it’s also Amy’s first CD on a more folk label. Since many factors channel an artist like Amy Rigby into the singer songwriter venues largely associated with “new folk,” it will be very educational to see the marriage unfold. Bottom line, it’s just a really great singer songwriter on a really great singer songwriter label, the rest is just little boxes, to quote a folk song. (You may recall that Signature Sounds is also the home of last month’s feature artist Louise Taylor, whose new release *Velvet Town* also went far outside their former paradigm—we sure like what they’re doing over there.)

A very relaxed and entertaining conversation with Amy follows, she’s a real peach. She even says so herself, in the opener:

I look sweet but deep inside I’m awful
I’m colder than a frozen waffle
I’m always searching for the rip
in the silver lining
here it is
I’m busy being so downtrodden
I’m just a peach that’s going rotten
I wanna save the other peaches so I roll away
I’m careful where I land
Does anybody understand?

Here’s our suggestion: don’t even think about it, go here and buy this record. Then you can really feel a part of the following conversation with the Mod Housewife herself, Amy Rigby.

Puremusic: So you’re just back from the UK. How did it go over there?

Amy Rigby: Good, good. I was actually in Ireland.

PM: Oh, now I’m doubly jealous.

AR: And so, yeah, that was my first time over there. It was kind of a whole new experience.

PM: Now, I know that you played the town where my people come from, Dundalk. You played a place called the Spirit Store.

AR: Great club.

PM: Oh, really?

AR: Yes, it’s very cool. Dundalk is sort of a small city, or I guess you’d call it a large town probably. It’s an hour from Dublin, and quite historic, as so much of Ireland is. The club’s right on the water, and it’s a pub downstairs, and then the upstairs is just a really nice listening room that this guy runs. He’s just really into a lot of singer songwriters. And it’s got a great little sound system. This is really a nice—I mean, they had like Gail Davies playing there a week or two ago.

PM: She does well over there, doesn't she?

AR: Yeah. And I'm trying to think who else—he had this other American guy I'm sure you would know... Anyhow, like a lot of gigs over there, it's much more personal as far as the relationship between the artist and the promoter of the show. Like the promoter sets up accommodations for you, sometimes they'll give you a ride.

PM: Wow.

AR: It's just much less like business and much more a sort of cultural enrichment kind of thing.

PM: And so it's probably not unlikely that the club owners have a closer connection with your music than the average U.S. club owner does with the performer of the evening.

AR: Yeah, in some cases. And sometimes they'll have another job that they do also.

PM: Right.

AR: So they do the promoting just as a labor of love, and because it's something that they want to bring to the town. And a lot of times they're people who have lived in these towns all their lives, or they just want to bring something there that they love and that they think other people should know about.

PM: And how's the turnout in these towns? You go into a singer songwriter club, any given town, what can one expect?

AR: See, that one to me seemed kind of slim. I think we had about 25 people. But then they told me about other people who had nobody show up, so they just called the gig on account of nobody. So it's all so relative, isn't it? I mean, 25 maybe doesn't seem like much, but at a place like that, as far as they were concerned, I did all right.

PM: Yeah. And God knows that can happen easily enough in Nashville.

AR: Oh, that's for sure.

PM: I know David Olney's famous quote is: "If I just want to spend some time by myself, I'll book a gig in Nashville."

AR: So true.

PM: So, the new record is just amazing. The more I listen to it, the better I like it.

AR: Oh, thanks.

PM: How's the response on it so far?

AR: It's been great. It's the first record I've had where I'm just getting reports where people say, "I heard this song, I heard that song"—they're being played out on the radio, and in stores. And I just keep getting emails from people saying, "I heard 'Don't Ever Change,'" or like, "I heard your song. I was driving my car!" And so I'm really excited about that, because it feels like there's much more happening sooner than usual.

PM: Can you tell if some songs are jumping out there faster than others? Is there a single, per se?

AR: There's not a single right off the bat. We decided to hold off on a single and just send the album out and see which tracks the people picked up on. But I think "Don't Ever Change" is the song that—it has an effect on people.

PM: Oh, it's a remarkable song.

AR: My last gig was in Belfast, and these people came from Glasgow to Belfast—which, I mean, it's not really that far, but it is like they came from one country—

PM: Right, they came from a different *country*, for Pete's sake...

AR: —just because they heard that song on the radio in Scotland. So, in that way, I think there's that song, for instance. And people like "Are We Ever Going to Have Sex Again?"—that gets a good response.

PM: That rings true.

AR: Yeah, [*laughs*] that rings true. And then some like the title song, "Til The Wheels Fall Off." That's a good, you know, rockin' track that people like to play. I think "The Deal" is another one, and "Breakup Boots," people have been playing those.

PM: So it seems that Signature, your new label, is doing a pretty bang-up job on the radio.

AR: Yes, definitely doing a good job.

PM: To me, it's a fascinating occurrence that a pop person like yourself has become allied with very a respected folk label. I like that they're doing it, and also that you're doing it. What's the story behind that deal?

AR: I guess I'm trying to branch out and find an audience. I think nowadays pop is almost a dirty word. It almost means you're doomed to not sell any records, unless you're a teenager.

PM: Because there is no grownup pop, per se.

AR: Right. There's no channel for it. There's nowhere for it to go. There are no clubs for you to play at. There's no network. Whereas with the whole folk, singer songwriter world, there's just an intense network of performers and venues and fans, so there are avenues to pursue.

PM: Yeah. It's not that it's that big, but it is there, it's established.

AR: It exists, yeah. So, for people like me—where pop is the basis for the songwriting, but the lyrics and songs will hopefully stand up without all the arrangements, and they'll ring true—the folk world is one of the few places that's viable for playing live music right now.

PM: And it's hard to find artists in singer songwriterdom who really incorporate genuinely pop elements. There's "new folk" people and this and that, but that's just another turn of that same diamond. I mean, the people who actually have pop mentality in their chord structure and in their lyric and melody approach are few and far between.

AR: Yeah, I guess that's true. So hopefully that's part of what attracted Signature to me, that what I'm doing is just a different take on being a singer songwriter.

PM: So do you know where that attraction began?

AR: I know that Jim Olsen, one of the owners, saw me play up in New England. I was opening some shows for Richard Shindell, who had put an album or two out on the label. Opening for him worked really well, even though it might not seem like that natural a fit. He's kind of a folk god at this point, he's got great lyrics, and people come really prepared to listen to intelligent lyrics. So even though my approach is a little more punk rock, or more pop, people could still get into the lyrics, I think.

PM: Yeah. You will, for instance, talk a little differently about sex and relationships than Richard Shindell will tend to.

AR: Yeah, that's true. A little more blunt, I guess.

[laughter]

PM: And a little more fun, if I do say so myself.

AR: But so I think that they saw me doing some of those shows and also some festival stuff that I did up in the New England area, solo and with the band. I think a lot of the people who go to those shows got into music through rock, and now there just aren't the places to go to find music now. So when I'm actually in front of an audience, they don't even remember how much they loved rock until they see somebody like me, and then it comes back to them. They remember when they see Springsteen or somebody who's been around and popular forever, but they don't go seeking it out. You know what I'm saying?

PM: Right. They don't go see anybody new.

AR: Yeah, they don't know that there are still people doing that who are their contemporaries. I think that can be surprising to people. Maybe that was part of the deal for Signature, too.

PM: It's always been part of Puremusic's mission to bring not just roots or folk but pop music for grownups to their ears, because there's no label for it, there's no way for pop musicians who are grown up to find their audience.

AR: It is hard. Not to say that you'd want people *[laughs]* like Bruce Springsteen and Neil Young and stuff to go away. That's part of it: I don't think any of us expected people to still be making really viable, meaningful music into their fifties and sixties, but some of them are.

PM: Right, there was no precedent.

AR: But that leaves very few slots open for the rest of us to kind of come in, you know what I mean?

PM: Yes. Like you can't get a job here until somebody dies, and nobody's dying.

AR: Right.

PM: Everybody cleaned up, people aren't overdosing on drugs anymore. That's the problem.

AR: *[laughs]* That's part of it, yeah.

PM: Your songs are so funny. I can't help but think they should really be strung together with spoken word and be in the theater. Has that been tried yet by you, or will it be?

AR: It hasn't been tried. I mean, I love the idea. I think that's probably a matter of me meeting up with the right person who could help me put that together. *[laughs]*

PM: Surely you and your co-writer Bill DeMain, who's had some theater experience, could string together the spoken word to put that show together.

AR: Well, it's definitely a nice idea. And yeah, between the two of us, we probably could come up with something. I like the idea a lot.

PM: I helped out with Annie Gallup's two theater shows.

AR: Now, what did she do?

PM: Well, she, as you know, has some very funny songs, but they're of a very different sort. But these were more serious shows of song cycles of twelve or fifteen songs, with spoken word bits in the middle, joining the songs. And they were both very good shows, and had good lights, and went over very well. She hasn't brought it on the road yet, but in her theatrically versed town of Ann Arbor, it went over really well.

AR: Yeah, that's a great idea.

PM: And I really would love to see you do that same thing. She didn't do too much acting, per se, in between the numbers, it was mostly about the songs. In your case, I would think there'd be plenty of room for that.

AR: *[laughs]* I like the idea—like sketches, you mean?

PM: Yeah, sketches, exactly. Because, I mean, you're expressive with your face, you have big eyes, and you talk with your hands—

AR: No, it's a cool idea. I think it's a good way to go.

PM: It's another alternative, really, to get the baby boomers out.

AR: Right. They'll go to the theater. I noticed that, because I went to see this play Off-Broadway in New York, this trio called Betty. They'd been kicking around up in the Northeast for twenty years. And somebody—either them or someone else—hit on the idea of doing this show that was like a history of them. And they were in it, and so they kind of acted out how they got together, how they stayed together as a band. But it was amazing to go to the theater on a Sunday afternoon, and it was just packed with people in their forties—thirties, forties, fifties—watching a show about music. But if you had put Betty, the band, on in a club at 10:00 or 11:00 at night in the same neighborhood and charged five or ten dollars to get in, people wouldn't have gone. But here they were paying \$40 a ticket. That's an eye opener.

PM: That's very interesting. I've often heard it said that if there were two doors, one said "Heaven" and other said "Lecture on Heaven," the lecture on heaven would have people lined up around the block.

AR: *[laughs]* That's hilarious. But it just seems true. I think you're right. It's almost like, with my lyrics, too, being so kind of close to the bone, sometimes I think it's just maybe a little

uncomfortable for some people. But if it was in a theatrical context, people wouldn't feel like they were seeing, like, my story. You know what I mean?

PM: Yeah.

AR: Like they weren't hearing about my life—which they're really not, because it's fiction, even though it's real. They're songs. It's not like I'm getting up there and everything that I'm saying is absolutely what happened to me.

PM: Of course.

AR: But maybe it comes across that way a little too much to people. But if I call it theater then that distance is built in, so maybe people can feel a little more comfortable about it or something.

PM: And you know, that show is just a setup, a prologue, epilogue, and five sketches. That's all that is. You already have all the songs.

AR: Right, right.

PM: I want to see that show. I'm going to start bugging Bill DeMain about that right away.

AR: Yeah.

PM: While we're on the subject of our thin, clever friend—

AR: *[laughs]*

PM: —I love the DeMain co-writes—well, anything with his name on it I tend to love. But “The Deal” is a great song.

AR: Oh, yeah.

PM: The Carpenters on drugs.

AR: *[laughs]* Yeah, it's one of those where Bill kind of—he had a musical idea, and I had just seen this Seinfeld episode called “The Deal” that was exactly like what was going on in my life that week. And so we just kind of—

PM: I forget that Seinfeld episode. That's the one where...

PM: Where Jerry and Elaine sleep together again. And they say there's not going to be any sort of obligation to each other. “We won't let *this* interfere with *that*.” Friendship is separate, and the sex is just kind of—“Well, we're both lonely, right? We don't have anything else going on right now, so why can't we do this? But it's not going to affect anything to do with our friendship.” And obviously, if that worked better, more people would be doing it.

PM: Right. I'm trying right now. *[laughs]*

AR: So that was kind of the idea behind that song.

PM: Yeah. That never works. And it's very unfortunate, but it never works.

AR: You try, though. I do.

PM: Oh, every few years I try.

AR: *[laughs]*

PM: So obviously, that's your line, "If things get weird, we can always bail."

AR: That's right.

PM: That's one of my favorite lines on the record.

AR: But it's weird playing that song in a place like Ireland—oh my God, I just felt like—

PM: Oh, because it doesn't translate?

AR: I just felt like, "I am way too cynical for these people."

PM: *[laughs]*

AR: I mean, divorce is barely even legal in Ireland.

PM: Oh, wow!

AR: It's only recently. And so I just felt like, "Life is a lot simpler over in a place like this"—or at least the rules that they impose on people make it seem like it should be simpler. It's not, but—

PM: Yeah, I had no idea that it would be like that, but of course, it's so ultra Catholic, it makes sense.

AR: I mean, people still relate, but I felt almost like some sort of a circus that comes to town: "See modern life gone awry, and all that can go so very wrong."

[laughter]

AR: I feel that in the States sometimes too, depending on what town I'm playing in.

PM: Oh, yeah.

AR: But some people are just way more sophisticated than others.

[laughter]

AR: And some songs—and that's a good example, maybe only two people in the audience could relate, and the rest of them may be thinking, "I'm here with my boyfriend, or my husband, and are you saying that that's wrong?" I don't know, I probably read way too much into what people think. They probably can't follow it.

PM: On the other hand, they probably can universally follow "Are We Ever Going to Have Sex Again?" Or do you run into trouble with that?

AR: Oh, no, no. I mean, that gets a huge round of applause everywhere. It really does. I mean, I think people, single or married, in general, everybody kind of relates to that. Because we're constantly bombarded with this idea that everybody—on TV and in movies and songs and

videos—that everybody is having all this sex. And I think everybody looks at their life and says, “Well, what about me?”

PM: “How come I’m not having that much sex?”

AR: Exactly. *[laughs]*

PM: Do we think that Signature is going to do anything different with your CD from their normal approach to marketing a record? Are they going to do ads in any different places than they would for their folk releases? I wonder.

AR: That’s a good question. I guess I should be looking into that around now. *[laughs]* I think things have—they’ve already had response from publications that they might not normally get reviews in.

PM: Really? Anybody we should mention?

AR: Well, like Spin or something, magazines that have been interested in me in the past. I’ve been so busy, I really have not been able to exactly follow what’s going on. The traveling made it really hard to keep up with what’s gone on in the last weeks.

PM: Right.

AR: But there’s been a lot.

PM: That’s beautiful. Let’s talk about the three or four distinct recording environments that went into this record. First of all, the song that sounds the most single-y to me is the opener, “Why Do I,” and that was co-produced with Richard Barone [of The Bongos fame, among other things] in NYC, right?

AR: Right.

PM: How did that come about?

AR: That came about because he saw my show up in New York in the summer, and he said, “Oh, oh, I really would love to help you record that song, and why not just do it this week. You’ve got the band. Everybody who played the song knows it. Let’s just go into a studio and record it.” So that was really the start of my album, because he motivated me.

PM: Wow. So you had the band with you, or the band for that gig lived in New York?

AR: Yeah, I just rehearsed with a bunch of people. I put bands together wherever I can.

PM: Right.

AR: Wherever I am, with whomever, with people that I’ve used before or people that I find. So we had rehearsed and played a show in New York, and maybe we were doing another show or two in Jersey, or up North.

PM: Where were you playing up there?

AR: That show that Richard came to was at the Mercury Lounge. Yeah, so they’d worked up that song with me.

PM: I've heard a lot about him though I've never met him. What kind of a guy is Barone?

AR: *[laughs]* Oh, he's a handful.

PM: Oh, really?

AR: Well, he's such a live wire. He's got so much energy, it's incredible. "Handful" is probably not the right word, because he's so sweet and so supportive, but he's just got energy to burn. And he's always got his finger in so many pies, always got a lot going on. To me he's like one of those great New York characters. I mean, he's not from the City originally, but—

PM: He's a Jersey guy, right?

AR: Yeah. He grew up in Florida, but yeah, he spent a lot of time in Hoboken.

PM: Right.

AR: He's just one of those people who's had a band in New York and been on the scene for as long as I was up there.

PM: And you were up there a long time?

AR: Yeah, twenty-some years.

PM: Twenty years.

AR: He's just got a great pop sensibility.

PM: I'm flipping out, really, on a great Laura Cantrell record lately, where she covered your song "Don't Break the Heart." [see our review] Is she a New York friend?

AR: Yes. She's from Nashville, but she's been up in New York.

PM: Oh, she's from Nashville?

AR: Uh-huh, she grew up here, but she's been in New York. I first met her because she was DJ-ing at Columbia, at WKCR, Columbia college radio, who've always done a lot of country music shows. And so I first met her when I had kind of a country band up there. And then she moved on to WFMU, and had The Radio Thrift Shop there. So that's how I knew her. And then she started playing shows a couple years ago, and yeah, covered a bunch of songs from different friends from the New York scene.

PM: And that's one of the greatest songs, though, on that record, "Don't Break the Heart."

AR: Oh, thanks.

PM: It's really a swell song.

AR: Yeah, even Elvis Costello said it was a favorite.

PM: Come on!

AR: Yeah.

PM: Where did he hear it?

AR: Oh, he's a huge fan of Laura. And he actually had Laura opening for him on part of his American tour. He got the record and asked her to do the tour.

PM: Oh, that must have been an incredible feeling to have her say that Elvis loved that song.

AR: Yeah. I actually saw the email where he said it.

PM: Oh, that's hot.

[laughter]

AR: I saved it.

PM: No kidding...

So there are two great Nashville recording environments on the new record. Let's talk about Steve Allen, and his Blue Planet Studio. So he put together a good band, right. Who was that all?

AR: Well, that was part of a band that I've done shows with, so Steve and I figured out when we could record, and then looked around to see who was available. There are certain combinations of bass players and drummers that I like together. And Rick Plant and Ken Coomer [Buddy & Julie Miller and Wilco], I'd had them together on a gig or two, and just liked the combination.

PM: Right.

AR: It's hard to explain why, but just the way some people play together. So yeah, we got them, and then, when we could, finished up with the guitar and stuff.

PM: Steve Allen himself plays some really cool guitar.

AR: He does, yeah.

PM: The way he lays the dirty Les Paul over the major seven chords, it sounds like Neil Young in the Buffalo Springfield days.

AR: Yeah, that's great. We usually have fun. Steve plays guitar with me a lot, we hang out together a lot, he's a very fun guy. And I'm very comfortable with him, so we just had a good time kind of playing around, and saying, "Let's try this, let's do that." And that's something I've really never had the luxury of doing in the studio before.

PM: The fun of goofing around in the studio trying stuff.

AR: Yes. Because it's usually been much more like, "Okay, we've got four or five guys, and we're on the clock."

PM: Right.

AR: Whereas with him it was more relaxed. And in general, Nashville is like that, I think, for recording.

PM: Oh, agreed. Even when recording studios are having such a hard time getting acts in there and getting time booked, it's still like that.

AR: Yeah.

PM: Speaking of cool guys, let's talk about George Bradfute at Tone Chaparral Studio.

AR: Uh-huh. George was the only one who I really didn't know well. I'd met him and been by when Joy White was over there making some demos of songs that we'd written. But I loved the Jason Ringenberg record that he'd done there, the first solo one.

PM: That was a great record.

AR: And the Paul Burch stuff that he'd done there.

PM: Did you have brunch at Paul Burch's restaurant this morning? [The Red Wagon, 10th & Woodland, Nashville]

AR: Yeah, I did.

PM: Yeah, me too.

AR: But it's funny, Frank, because it wasn't my intention. I was going to go to Monell's with some friends. And then they were going at 11:00 a.m., and I just was not ready to eat that huge groaning buffet of food—

[laughter]

AR: —and so I passed on that. And then somebody else called and said they were going to Red Wagon later, so I was totally up for it, and it was great.

PM: Yeah, and everybody who reads this interview, when they drop into Nashville, they ought to know about the Red Wagon. It's owned by Paul Burch and his wife Meg Guiffrida.

One of the wonderful things about George's studio, just like Steve's, is that he'll play any number of things to make your music as incredible as it really is.

AR: Yeah. We actually did a lot of live recording at George's, really trying to get as much keepable stuff live as we could. Vocals, all the guitars—or all the guitars that we could, and the bass and drums. And then we'd just kind of have fun with whatever else presented itself to go on top of that stuff. George would come up with ideas after I'd gone home, and then play them for me when I came back. And we'd take it from there, and that was really, really just great. It reminded me how much fun it is to record. And I could have easily done ten more songs there.

PM: Right.

AR: So that really helped me round out the record.

PM: Nashville is fantastic like that. I mean, you have these producers who, after you go home, you come back in the morning and say, "Okay, let's see what Brad or George or Steve did while I was sleeping." *[laughs]*

AR: It's so true, yeah.

PM: It's just the incredible amount of talent. I mean, I noticed on the notes on "Don't Ever Change," he played cuatro, upright bass, clarinet, and viola.

AR: I know.

PM: I mean, come on, man.

AR: It was just crazy. It's funny, because that song—that's one where I just didn't want to do the obvious thing—I don't know, I didn't want to have your basic folk rock or country rock arrangement. It just needed something that was more felt than arranged. We had it just a vocal and guitar, and I would have been fine with just using that, but then we kind of dabbled a little with the—what's that thing called, not a keyboard, like the mel...?

PM: The mellotron.

AR: Yeah. So we put a little mellotron on there, and it was like, "Oh, that's opening it up a little bit." And then it seemed like maybe there should be a bass on there. And then when I went home he kind of came up with that odd combination. I really liked that odd combination, the way you can't really tell whether it's a string instrument or a wind, you know what I mean?

PM: Yeah.

AR: It kind of reminded me of—well, I love the production of some of those Simon and Garfunkel records, and I think it reminded me of one of those.

PM: Roy Halee there, right?

AR: Exactly. I don't know how they recorded. I don't know if they did it like Elton John did, where he'd often just go and play the piano and do the vocal, and then Gus Dudgeon would come in and do these incredible productions around the performance. And maybe they worked the same way, I'm not sure.

PM: I don't know.

AR: But anyway, that seemed to work with that song, to just kind of build on the performance.

PM: I think that some of The Band's classic records were like that, too. Certainly the brown record, the second one, I remember reading Levon's account of those days, where they'd cut all the basics and then Garth would stay up all night—

AR: Yeah, and do stuff.

PM: Yeah, and they'd come in or get up in the morning hung over and see where they were now.

AR: *[laughs]*

PM: But as great as all three of those environments were, my very favorite stuff is the tracks that were cut in Glasgow.

AR: Oh!

PM: Wow, David Scott of the Pearlfishers, who is this guy? I'm coming to yet another party late on the Pearlfishers. I've written him subsequent to hearing the record. He's going to send me some music.

AR: Did you hear back? Because he sometimes doesn't check his email that often.

PM: Yeah, he got right back to me very nicely. We hope to cover David Scott and the Pearlfishers shortly.

AR: Oh, good.

PM: But give us your take, how did you meet him and what was that experience like?

AR: Well, Davie's a wonderful sweet guy that I met at a friend's. A mutual friend introduced him to me. I was playing a show in Scotland at this little town outside of Glasgow, and my friend actually gave Davie all my CDs. And through email I talked to him about just playing guitar with me on a couple of the more challenging gigs that were in loud kind of drinking places where nobody would know my music, or necessarily even care.

PM: Right, help you break through.

AR: And I just needed even some moral support up on stage.

[laughter]

AR: And so literally he came to the first gig and just knew every one of my songs, knew what to play, and was—he didn't just know them, he totally enjoyed playing them. And we had such a great time. He did that with me on a couple shows in Scotland, and was just real encouraging. After that first trip, he gave me his later Pearlfisher CD, which I took home and I just cried, I just loved it so much. And it was so touching to me how—I mean, we're too spoiled here. Given what people have to work with in other places—not to say they don't have good equipment and stuff like that, but their music is so much their focus, or something, and the love of what they're doing just comes through. It's almost like magic, because they're in this cold rainy place and they love this California pop music *[laughs]*—or he does. And he just creates it out of thin air, and I just think that that's amazing.

PM: Yeah, to take a rainy, industrial, down and dirty place like Glasgow and make California surf'n' pop music, it's something to think about.

AR: Yeah. It's like he really does have some kind of magic about it, I believe it *[laughs]* though it sounds kind of crazy. And it's that pure love and joy for that kind of music. So when we worked together, it was basically me needing to trust him. We didn't have much money to work with or a lot of resources. Even on "The Deal," when it got to the little instrumental break, we talked about how the obvious thing to do would be to call a horn player and have them come in and do the little background horns.

PM: Yeah.

AR: But Davie said, "Well, we're here now." So then we did the little vocal thing instead, more out of necessity than anything else. But now I just can't imagine anything else. Because the horn would have been so obvious, and so kind of copping what it should be, whereas the little vocal thing, I don't know... So I think that all of the songs that I did with him are kind of like that. If I heard something and I would say, "Well, could we get somebody to come in and do this music?" And

he'd say, "Well, you hear it, why don't you just do it?"

PM: [laughs]

AR: Not giving me a hard time or anything, but just making me feel like, "Well, why not? What's going to be bad about it?"

PM: Wow.

AR: So that was really just—I don't know, it worked out great.

PM: Well, yeah. You and I have talked before about you doing an album someday of all your—or at least a dozen of your—co-writes with Bill DeMain.

AR: Yeah.

PM: And I hope that when you do, you do it with Davie Scott.

AR: With Davie. Yeah. It's interesting, because I think if you don't have as many resources—and it was really just me and Davie and a drummer, so something about the songs, like it just feels like it goes right to—I felt that a little bit with the stuff I did with George, too, like it just goes right deep to your emotions. You're not having to translate your ideas for a half a dozen people, so it more comes out of the same place that the song came from.

PM: Has Davie been to Nashville yet and met the Brad Joneses and the George Bradfutes?

AR: No. I mean, he's well aware of Brad, and he's been out—I don't know that he's made it to California. I know he's been in contact with like Mark Linnet, the guy who engineered my first two albums and who's done a lot of the Beach Boys remixing and worked on a lot of stuff with Brian Wilson. And so anyway, Davie's well aware of a lot of the people over here. And so, yeah, wouldn't it be great if he could come over.

PM: Yeah, we'll see him sometime.

AR: I hope so, yeah.

PM: What's the story behind that great duet with Todd Snider on "Til the Wheels Fall Off"?

AR: I took the title from that Dylan song "Brownsville Girl," where he says, "We're going all the way"—and he says—"til the wheels fall off and *burn*." But when I heard the song, I thought it was *roll*.

PM: [laughs]

AR: And then somebody said to me afterwards, "Oh yeah, where he says, 'Til the wheels fall off and burn,'" I was like, "Oh, that's right. It was burn, not roll." [laughter]

So anyway, I've been doing these shows with Todd Snider, opening a lot of shows for him lately, and just really loving it, having a great time, and really enjoying him. I could watch him every night. And once we'd recorded the basics for that song and knew it was going to be kind of lively—almost like a party track—I thought it would be good to have another voice on there, a guy. And I started trying to think of who had a nice real-sounding character-filled voice, to play the guy. So I asked him to do it, and he was so happy to come in and do it. I mean, he loved it. So that was

cool.

PM: Wow. How would you describe his personality? What kind of cat is he?

AR: He's a really, really funny person. He's just funny. Tells a hilarious story. He's super sweet and super—I don't know, what's the word—like unassuming, and gentle, and honest. I mean, he's just an honest person. I don't know. I won't use that word “real”—

[laughter]

AR: Way overused. But yeah, he's just honest. In one way he seems like a sort of messed up guy, that's part of his persona almost, and maybe it's true, but he's a great performer. And I think he works really hard.

PM: Right. Yeah, he makes great records.

AR: And his songs are so touching and honest, but funny at the same time, and that's just how he is.

PM: That was a really cool blend that you guys had there.

AR: Yeah. It was fun to have him come and do it, and I didn't know really what it would sound like. He had me come up and sing a time or two on a song of his on stage, but we hadn't really worked on it or anything, and it probably sounded okay. But I didn't really know what our voices would sound like together on tape. But somehow I just felt like even our personalities went well together.

PM: Another collaboration on the record is with a guy that we both dig a lot, and that's Bill Lloyd. “Shopping Around,” that's a super song.

AR: Thanks. Bill—actually I talked to him today, he just did a little tour for the First Amendment Center. He said he got on the bus, and this great sounding track was blasting out, and he said, “Oh, what's this?” And then he realized it was our song! [laughs] He'd kind of forgotten already. But yeah, I thought it turned out really great—it really sounded so good from his little home studio. I mean, he does great stuff there.

PM: Ahh, you cut that at Bill's?

AR: Uh-huh. Well, we did the drums at Steve Allen's, and then we took that over to Bill's.

PM: Your tunes are so cinema-ready. You seeing much of that action yet?

AR: Through the years I've had a little bit of that. In fact, and this is kind of crazy, but *The Real World* did a license for the new album. I guess they're using some of the songs on *The Real World*.

PM: Is that an MTV show?

AR: Yeah.

PM: I've never seen it or anything.

AR: Well, it's kind of funny because it's about, like, twenty-year-olds. But they really like the

record a lot, so that's good.

PM: Wow.

AR: But, yeah, I hope that Hollywood will snap something up, or TV. So much of that kind of thing is just about crossing paths with the right person on the right day.

PM: Truly it is.

AR: That's really how a lot of that stuff happens.

PM: I've heard tell of a music magazine that's in the planning stages by guys from *Spin* and *Vibe*, tentatively called *Good Music*, for people over thirty.

AR: Wow.

PM: I'm excited to think how a person like you could fit into that scheme.

AR: Yeah, I hope that comes to pass.

PM: Because I just think that finding pop music for grownups is really, really important, and as many people as we've touted in that regard, you're top of the list. We think that your music is really important for people over thirty—it's good for anybody, but I think it's more than that, it's really important for people who are grown up.

AR: That magazine sounds great. Do you think young people will read it too, or—

PM: I think it depends on how they market themselves.

AR: Right.

PM: Like when the Lifetime Channel says, "It's for women," do men watch it? I doubt it. I certainly don't. That would be enough for me to go, "Yeah, right."

AR: So if the magazine's advertising is for Depends or something—

PM: Oh my.

[laughter]

AR: Hang on, let me think of something better than that—Rogaine, how about that?

PM: Right.

AR: Or what's that sort of estrogen, like hormone replacement therapy.

[laughter]

AR: That's probably it—yeah, that'll kind of be the key, who's going to advertise in the magazine.

PM: Yeah, the computer companies will go crazy. And cars.

AR: Well, you'd hope so. But I mean, Frank, well, what about us?

[laughter]

AR: I don't know about you, but I've never shopped for a new car.

PM: Yeah, right. No, I'm not in the market currently.

AR: So it's almost like—couldn't they take it down a few notches and just make it—

PM: Yeah, let's talk about books and CDs.

AR: Yeah. Not so upscale.

PM: Well, the more I know you and your music, the better I like the both of them, and it's really a pleasure to share you with our readers today.

AR: Oh, well, thanks.

PM: Thanks for your time today, Amy.

AR: Okay, Frank, see you soon.

