

Angela Faye Martin is a singer/songwriter. Born in Atlanta, Georgia, but now living in North Carolina. Her 2009 release "Pictures From Home" was Mark Linkous of Sparklehorse's final full production. We recently got the chance to talk with Angela about memories of working with Mark, and her plans for the future.

**MTT: What first got you into music and when did you start playing?**

AFM: Probably the vinyl my parents & brothers had around the house and the sway music seemed to have over them impressed me. It ranged from disco, to rock, to country. I first attempted guitar at age 11. My grandmothers died before I was born but one was a palm-reader & guitar player. They say things skip a generation.

**MTT: Growing up, and living most of your life in the Southern States, you've been surrounded by many great artists, musicians, and authors. What are some of your favorites?**

AFM: For literature, I'd say, Charles Frazier and Wayne Caldwell because of how they write about the mountains, where I live. Frazier's latest novel, NIGHTWOODS is the last thing I read. He gave me a British edition at one of my husband's poetry readings. Oddly, I know more authors than I do musicians! But it's a long way out for me to go see music. For music, Sparklehorse, of course. And for art, Howard Finster, having spent a lot of time at Paradise Gardens as a teen.

**MTT: Your first solo effort, One Dark Vine, was released in 2005. Had you been a part of any bands before this?**

AFM: I fronted a couple of bands out of NW Georgia, during the late 1980's. But leading bands was then, and remains, a very difficult undertaking, rife with sexism, to me. While I may form bands for specific projects, I will always attempt to keep personnel to a minimum.



**MTT: Your 2009 album, Pictures From Home, was produced by the late great Mark Linkous. How did you end up working with Mark?**

AFM: An 88 year-old friend, who lived in the next county, introduced us. Once we were friends, Mark offered to record a 3-song demo for me. When he realized labels had no interest in helping me complete an album, he took matters into his own hands and we made a truly

independent album.

**MTT: When you began working with Mark, was it something that kind of just fit together perfectly? It definitely sounds like it.**

AFM: In spirit, it was a perfect fit. Mr. Jackson, who introduced us, was determined that we meet. But in practice, days were rife with cancellations, Mark's schedule, transportation problems and his physical and emotional pain. He was very open about things he was doing to try and improve his daily life yet on the other hand, he seemed to be destroying himself.

Personally, I quit a good job in order to make myself completely available, at a moments notice, to make sessions with Mark. But he'd always talk with me, was so kind and up-front about his struggles and I wouldn't take anything for the experience of working with him. For one thing, there was no higher functioning person than Mark, in his studio. I've haven't seen such genius and hard work before or since. Not to mention his love of order. In the brief time I knew him, he mentored me and taught me some of the best lessons of my life, from the mundane to songwriting. I'm only just beginning to understand and put into practice things he showed me. The practice of noting what he taught me also helps to alleviate some of the grief. It carries you in the opposite direction. It takes such technique to survive the kind of grief a suicide enacts, I'm discovering.

**MTT: What are some of your favorite memories of Mark?**

AFM: It's difficult to narrow this down, but my favorite was a motorcycle ride we took, before a session on Easter Sunday 2009. He said to squeeze him if I got scared. I was scared the whole time, but still waving at people in their yards.

Another time was a time he asked me to sit after tracking the album. He had a great sense of humor, especially when working, and was very playful that way but for this he stopped joking to make sure I listened to what he had to say about the songs and my playing. Can you imagine someone being so thoughtful? And he'd give me these little trinkets from his garage. A bag of watch parts, barrettes, insulators. . . We'd sometimes not begin a session until hours after I arrived. That was just how he was. He'd visit, like a true Southern host. He'd dig Sparklehorse posters out of a closet for me to take home while telling me great stories of his writings and experiences.

He only came to my house a few times but he was the sweetest guest. Carrying on about how well he slept here. A moment I'll never forget, was the second time he visited, we were trying

to talk but couldn't find a break in the greater dinner conversation. So I asked him if he wanted coffee and he followed me to the kitchen and told me, while I was making coffee, that he'd listened to the demos I gave him and that he'd produce my songs.

Eventually, I'd begun a kind of memoir of working with Mark, I'd share things I wrote for him and one day I asked him if he was like some artists who can't bare to listen to their own work? He said, "No one should ever commit something to media they can't bare to listen to, again and again." I agree with that.

**MTT: You took a hiatus from music from the spring of 2010, until early 2011. What was the inspiration behind your recent return to music?**

AFM: I shed the band I formed to perform the album. It was stifling me. So, when I got quiet and began to approach the subject of Mark's passing with honesty, I was able to write songs again. A heard a song by Reza called, Desert Land, which completely voiced my feeling about my writer's block - a kind of survivor's guilt regarding Mark. And with repeated plays, this song, performed by an Iranian in Paris, released it. I couldn't enjoy anything new, until that song came across. I was creatively numb.

And finally, going to the geographic place where Mark passed away helped me create a mythos around his passing, helping me write again. By noting the way the birds were assembled on power lines, anthropomorphizing their take on Mark, the names of the streets. It was almost clinical. And by describing these things and my memories, I wrote a song for him called, Swifts & Swallows. I believe, like a religion, that imagination when properly used, helps us survive. It's just that despair can inhibit the transmission and people have to help you. I'd be remiss not to mention that friends really kept after me. I wish I had pestered Mark more. But 'what if's' can't be verified, ever, and lead to insanity. What's important now, is to honor his legacy.

**MTT: Now that you've begun playing shows again, are there any plans to write and record some new material?**

AFM: I only just now have the songs I think could be a new album. I would like to begin recording again in January but I've no firm plans. It's still difficult for me to accept that I can't work with Mark again. But sometimes, when I pay close enough attention, I can sense his presence in the weather. I sensed it at a show I played this month. Back in 2009, when we were sending tracks to the mastering house, I told him that I would miss working with him. He said, "You will always have this album and every time you listen, you will be right here, in the studio, with me." So, of course, I still listen to it.

Part 1 of an ongoing series about Mark Linkous.

For more information on Angela Faye Martin visit: <http://www.angelifaye.com>

By Benson Simbirski

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