

“A little lamp wanting to be lightning”: Angela Faye Martin releases *Anniversary*

Singer-songwriter [Angela-Faye Martin](#) is not rewriting the book on Americana, but her take on Appalachian-haunted folk-rock is as forward-looking as it is back-reaching.



The title track to [Anniversary](#) (out today on Martin's own Totem Girl Music) opens with the spooky twang of string ringing over radio-static of a keyboard — which could either be the Mellotron or the modified Casio “Tablebeast,” played by Matt Linkous and owned by his brother, the late [Mark Linkous](#) of Sparklehorse.

Martin dedicates the new album to Mark, who produced her last record, '09's *Pictures From Home*, before he took his life in '10.

“Eagles pray with their might / and sometimes a smile looks just like a scythe,” Martin sings, unhurried, in her soft but infallible woman-child vocal. And, on the searing/soaring “Grace”: “I’m a little lamp wanting to be lightning / and I stand under your shivvertree / ‘til you return.” That song is accompanied by Melissa Moore Linkous (Matt’s wife) on violin — a shimmering touch that adds another layer of ache to the palpable missing of Mark.



Martin with Mark Linkous; photo from Knoxville.com.

But as much as Martin was affected by the late Sparklehorse musician, hers is a unique voice and style that draws on deep roots and deeper mysticism. (Seriously, hold Martin up against your Gillian Welch, your Be Good Tanyas, your Lucinda Williams — this girl can write.) “Honey” slinks through the snarl of guitars and dark washes of bass. Martin’s voice sweeping easily between a low whisper and a high lilt. Her sense of dynamics is impeccable, as is her ability to marry mountain balladry with modern electronics and hooks that are catchy if not completely poppy.

And, while *Anniversary* is dark (“It’s a bit grievous,” she wrote to me. “It was a grievous time.”) it’s not without its moments of beauty and levity. Many of them, really. And among those, “Lovesong for Paris” is a standout. Lush and shuddering with misty autumnal wonder, the song eases through a crush of melodic guitars and percussion into the warbling chorus. Swooningly cinematic from beginning to end, the song is a breathless leap into all that’s right with the world.



The delicate “Ravens at Night” matches chiming tones with finger-style guitar and finger snaps. Martin’s vocal is close to the mic, imparting secret folklore and possibly ancient spells. There is a certain witchery whip-stitched into *Anniversary*, but it’s a good magic. A totem for safe passage, an amulet for sweet dreams. Trust Martin’s incantations and her poetry in both their child-like wonder and their wild abandon (the churning, stinging “Baker’s Wife”).

Included in the magic is a prayer of sorts. Two, actually. The album’s final tracks, “Swifts & Swallows” and “Which Fork” are dedicated to Mark Linkous and [Vic Chesnutt](#) respectively. Chesnutt was also a mentor of a sort to Martin, and a friend to Linkous. Chesnutt ended his life just three months prior to Linkous’ death — a grievous time, indeed.

“I’ll make the coffee / If you take the clip out / You say you’re sorry / Let’s take the bike out,” she sings to Mark’s memory. The song is featured on [sparkle on](#), a blog celebrating the music of Sparklehorse.

But, though *Anniversary* ends (as it begins) at the side of a grave, this is not a sad album. “Which Fork” is a slow waltz. “You have no control / all you have is your hopes / and they take their toll,” Martin sings, sagely. But she’s still dancing. With her ghosts and with her hopes, with her guitar and with her darkly lovely songs. Because as much as these songs recall what has been, they’re really about what’s to come.