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Mary Lamont and Jim Marchese: Muse on Muse



By Michael Block | Photo by Kenny Janosick

With the generative power of a two-headed vortex, Mary Lamont and Jim Marchese have carved out distinctive and continually expanding paths in the areas of music, photography and media. They also have harnessed the mythical and often maligned power of love. “We have been married forever,” is how Mary described their implicit trust and sacred solidarity. Their combined mojo has led them to a seemingly endless number of avant-garde and madcap adventures.

Years after they met, Mary’s memory of her initial moments with Jim inspired her to write the torch song “I’m in Trouble Now.” Theirs was a brief whirlwind of a courtship, culminating in Jim’s marriage proposal atop the World Trade Center. The broad and almost limitless view from those now-extinguished structures is echoed in the eternally optimistic and horizon-shattering perspective that Jim brings to the partnership. “Jim is the impetus behind all the creative stuff that goes on,” said Mary.

During their early years in Manhattan, they sustained each other with a constant infusion of audaciousness, support and laughter. As each other’s bulwark, they embarked on non-traditional and serpentine career paths. Relegating her inner songstress to a twitching backburner, Mary worked as a model, booking agent’s assistant, go-to girl at *Crawdaddy* magazine and as a receptionist—for Alice Cooper, no less. She said, “I had fun and learned so many things that would be useful later on.”

The connections Mary made in the worlds of print media, celebrity talent and music soon proved invaluable to Jim's own career. "Mary became my photo rep," he explained. Brimming with personality and fierce persistence, the then-recent FIT graduate achieved success as a freelance photographer. Few people have had Jim's experiences of being in close proximity to such iconic figures as Liberace, Neil Armstrong and Gerald Ford, never mind enjoying the intimacy crucial to capturing someone's essence in a visual medium.

But Jim's opus as a photographer is undoubtedly the classic shots he took of Bruce Springsteen while on tour with the band throughout Europe. For this, he received the rare honor of a gallery show in London. Another unimpeachable testament to Jim's artistry was Julian Lennon's purchase of one of his photographs of The Dakota building, where John Lennon lived and was fatally shot.

A particularly memorable and sensory-laden adventure unfolded while the duo served as photo team and guests at Steven Van Zandt's wedding. The occasion included the bride and groom walking down a candle-lit aisle while an in-the-flesh Percy Sledge sang, "When a Man Loves a Woman." In the roles of best man and preacher, were Bruce Springsteen and Little Richard, respectively.

A move to Long Island in the early '90s set in motion the dynamics that would lead to the formation of the Mary Lamont Band in 1996. While still busily engaged in the world of photography and enjoying their new roles as parents, Jim rekindled a childhood passion for guitar through a swift and complete immersion into the Island's jam scene. Mary, who needed to be coaxed to sing in church by her dad while growing up in rural Canada, required her husband's gentle prodding to share her innate and prodigious gift as a singer at the jams. She eventually agreed and very quickly morphed into a country sorceress who could get Mitt Romney to dance the two-step. Mary said, "Whenever Jim played songs with a country feel...it was a good fit...I already had the hick thing down." Jim added, "Mary is so natural and real." It was set—Mary would sing, Jim would play guitar and act as her manager.

Fifteen years of playing a ballsy and unique brand of Americana has yielded many rewards: Headlining the IMAC Theater, winning three New York Metro Country Music awards and touring mainland China, among them. During this tour, Mary and Jim had the surreal experience of playing a set of their "killer country" supplemented by twenty Chinese sax players, each wearing a white suit. The band's two cds, *You Don't Have to Knock* and *How Lucky*, have garnered fantastic reviews and international airplay. In 2011, Mary added "disc jockey" to her CV as the host of *Down Home Country*, her monthly hoedown on WUSB. Recently, she sat in with the legendary Les Paul Trio at the Iridium in Manhattan, while Jim stealthily took some photographs. He said simply, "That was a delight."

And so it goes. Love, music, memories, love, mus—

Hear more at marylamont.com. See more at jimmarchese.com.