

Amy Gallatin is Roger Williams' June Carter - and vice versa

By Don Wilcock

On the surface, it seemed like a simple - even perfunctory - email message: "Just love the music, and it will love you back." Ah, but there was a novel's length of potential behind those 10 words that promised to change the lives of both Roger Williams who sent it and Amy Gallatin who received it. And much of that potential will be realized Friday night when the two of them play the Caffe Lena as leaders of the band Stillwaters.

"It's funny," says Amy today, "because he's kind of this dobro wonky type of guy. I never saw the other side of him when he was just my sideman because I was mired in my own stuff. He'd worked for me in '01 and '02."

A lot can happen in two years, and after what Amy describes as a meltdown during a less than stellar tour of Europe with her other band The Hot Flashes (three women in long dresses) she was back to the core bluegrass group Stillwaters at some dinky place that she'd rather remain nameless. "We get up on stage just to do a couple of songs because when I didn't have dobro in my band, I just missed it. The dobro is such an emotive instrument."

I probably don't have to tell you that Roger plays dobro. "I looked over at him. He's ready to kick the tune, and he just looked at me, and he said, 'Are you ready?' It just started the whole thing, 'cause he kicked off the tune, 'The Water Is Wide' which we still do."

Amy had always fantasized about having a relationship with a younger - maybe even a much younger - man, but at 50 she finds herself now with a man nine years her senior. The fact that Roger Williams lived two and half hours away from her in New Hampshire didn't matter. It was one of those things where love conquers all. I mean, she could rationalize it on objective terms.

"I was laying in bed one night, and I (said to myself), 'I really need to pick up the pieces of Stillwaters again, and I need to have somebody in my band that is not going to be less than this chick group that made this huge splash because we were chicks, and we wore evening gowns. I need something that's not going to be less than that, but I need to acknowledge that this Stillwaters thing for a myriad of reasons is not working for me.' All of a sudden I was like, 'Roger! I'll just go get him for every gig.'"

Amy describes the two and a half hour drives down from New Hampshire with Roger as something out of a third grader's diary. "So, I wound up going up and getting him for every gig, and that's when we got to know each other. It was like this amazing -"

She stops herself. "He loves country music like I do. We would sing together in the car."

That was four years ago. Now an inseparable couple living together in Amy's Glastenbury, Connecticut home, they've just released two albums at the same time.



Silly? Maybe, but one is the new Stillwaters album called "Phoenix" for the reason you can guess, and the other is Amy's gift to Roger. It's their Nashville record called "Something 'Bout You."

Amy says Roger's been called the most underappreciated dobro player in America. I saw him more than 40 years ago playing with the vetted Lily Brothers in the Hillbilly Ranch near the downtown Boston bus station in a dive populated by prostitutes and sailors. In the meantime he's played with the usual gang of suspects in the bluegrass fraternity, but he'd never played Nashville. Amy got him in the studio with Rich Adler whose credits include Johnny Cash and Dolly Parton. "It was like a dream," she says. "I remember he came out after one song, and he looked kind of dazed. He goes, 'I think I did that in one take.' I said, 'I'm sure you did.'"

The couple now has a \$12,000 debt to pay off on the two CDs, but they sound really good and the two have proof she's right about her man. She's a fine singer, too. He's working a day job while she books dates like the venerable Caffe Lena. ä