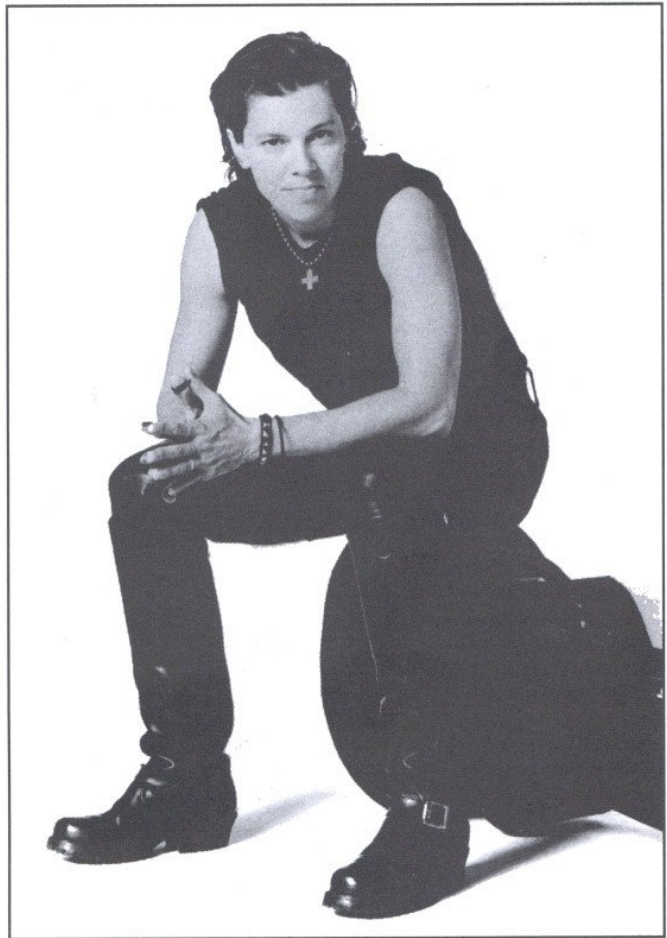


the on our backs interview

Angela Motter

Angela Motter is an up-and-coming Atlanta musician currently making a splash on the East Coast live music circuit; earlier this year she won a Gay and Lesbian Music Award for "Best Out Recording" for her song, "Does Your Mama Know?" from her new self-produced album, *Pleasure and Pain*. But Motter is not just another earnest lesbian with an acoustic guitar. Her music is soulful and funky, and she's not at all shy about talking about her life as a kinky, genderbent butch dyke.



On Our Backs: You've been performing since you were 10?

Angela Motter: I've been playing guitar since I was 10; I've been performing since I was 15.

On Our Backs: So how did you get started?

AM: There was a guy who came to our class when I was in fifth grade who played guitar, and he would do sing-alongs with us. I had just switched from a very good parochial school to this really shitty public school in Marietta County. He came and brought his guitar and started playing, and he plucked me out of the crowd and said, "Will you sing a solo for the class next door?" And I said sure. So my first vocal solo was "Leaving on a Jet Plane." And the rest is history; I started taking lessons from him and haven't looked back.

On Our Backs: Who were your influences? I know you mentioned Joni Mitchell.

AM: Joni Mitchell influenced all of us songwriters, at least from my generation. I also listened to a lot of jazz growing up. I studied classical guitar, so I actually listened to a lot of classical music. I was also influenced by the

music my brother was listening to at the time—all the great guitar players: Allman Brothers, Jimi Hendrix. And Bonnie Raitt was a big influence, of course, back when she was doing all that acoustic blues stuff. I've always been influenced by female songwriters.

On Our Backs: I noticed, however, that you're pretty explicit about not being in the tradition of Melissa Etheridge or the Indigo Girls. Is that just because people are going to group you with anyone they can think of, or is it something else?

AM: I think people who don't really know music go, "Oh you're a girl with a guitar; this is what you sound like." I think what we were trying to get across was that the music was not one dimensional. I don't mean one dimensional in a derogatory fashion; it's just that I cover a lot of ground. Just because I'm from Atlanta doesn't mean I'm going to sound like the Indigo Girls.

On Our Backs: But it does seem hard to describe your music.

AM: My manager is a fucking genius, the more I think about it, because she came up with that

"folkalternagroove" line. There's a specific genre coming out of Atlanta now; there's a lot of us in that category. This isn't just your mama's folk music. It's funk.

On Our Backs: Your song "isitaboyisitagirl" seems to have been inspired by the first line of a music review which asked that question about you. You seem both offended and amused by that. At the end of the song, you say, basically, that you're both, you're in between. Is it just that the music press doesn't recognize a butch dyke when they see one, or what?

On Our Backs: That's a really difficult question for me, because I'm living it, you know? I do feel trans; I definitely feel that there's not a pronoun for people like me.

On Our Backs: But it sounds like you don't think transitioning is something you want to do, at least right now.

AM: No, I mean, it would change my voice.

On Our Backs: That's the first thing I thought.

AM: And also, I like my body. I mean, I'm amused that I have breasts. When I look at myself in the mirror I go, "Whoa," because I'm

Interview by Lori Selke

expecting something else in my mind, but I don't think I'm the only one who looks in a mirror and is expecting something else. I'm real blessed. I have really good genes, I have a good body, I'm athletic. I think butch dykes who are like me, we're going, OK, where do we fit in? And where do the femmes who are attracted to us fit in? I guess I don't feel like a lesbian. I hesitate to say that because I feel that I sound like a whiner. But I like it, I enjoy being something in between.

On Our Backs: It can be an interesting place to be.

AM: Yeah, and as far as butch goes, I mean, do you call k.d. lang butch? k.d. lang just looks like a lesbian to me. I want to look like a guy. This whole amorphous mass of women that sort of vaguely all look the same, it's not something that interests me. And they're not interested in my music anyway, so it doesn't really matter! But I've had to look at what happens when I get onstage dressed the way I do. I usually pack onstage.

On Our Backs: You do?

AM: I have to pack on stage, because if I'm wearing tight jeans, it just does not look correct [otherwise]. It makes me sick to my stomach. I cannot do it anymore.

On Our Backs: So who comes up to you after your shows now? What sort of reaction do you get?

AM: I was at a bar a few years ago when I first started packing, and this sporty dyke came up to me. She looked like she goes to those golf events, still turns up the collar and shit. She came up to me, and said, "is that a jock strap you're wearing?" I mean, nothing about the music or the show. She just walked right up to me and asked about the jock strap. And I said, "Yeah, they're really comfortable and they're also really cheap." And that was the end of the conversation.

I have a theory that I take up a lot of space on stage and I represent something to people who feel like they can't quite go that far. I can't not go that far. It's who I am.

I was out during the Reagan years, and it was really scary then. It still is scary—I'm still afraid I'm going to get shot or something. Everyone was in the closet at that point. I was the only person who raised my hand and said, "Yeah, I'm out!" Because I figured, what happens if I don't get a record deal? Everybody was worried that they wouldn't get a record deal if they came out. Well, what are your chances? It's something like the same chance as getting hit by lightning. So I'm gong to live my whole life in the closet just in case? It's been the same way with the gender stuff—talk about being a queer among queers. Straight people have much less of a problem with me, straight women especially.

On Our Backs: I think it's obvious to anyone who listens to your album that you're kinky. So, I have to ask: top or bottom?

"I identify
as Daddy
more than
anything."

AM: I identify as Daddy more than anything. But I'm a switch. I have friends that use me as a Daddy that I don't sleep with. It's just that nurturing side, I guess, and it doesn't seem appropriate to call me Mommy!

On Our Backs: And you said that you like "femmes and fags."

AM: That's right.

On Our Backs: Could you be more specific?

AM: I have been involved with other girl-boys, which is how we relate to each other. It's always kind of a shock when we get our periods, because we're in this other land. For some reason I have a real appreciation for women. I don't know how to say it, but there are some femmes who are, to me, 100 percent woman. They like being a woman, never looked at themselves in a mirror and thought, "What am I becoming?" or anything, and that's a little bit different than your garden-variety dyke, to me.

On Our Backs: How was winning the GLAMA and performing at the awards ceremony?

AM: It was fabulous. The band just rocked. It was the whole "list of dreams" thing. I put this band together in New York, and we rehearsed the day of the show. I was walking by Sandra Bernhard backstage, and I just wanted her to see me as what I am—a good-looking guy. I didn't say hello, I just nodded to her, and she quivered her lips at me.

Later, I was crammed into the stairwell after the performance, and Ani DiFranco walked right by and said "great song." So I felt really seen. We were living the dream. The bigger the crowd, the more fired-up I am.

On Our Backs: You do seem to have quite a live reputation.

AM: You can put me in front of 20,000 people; I don't care. We'll do it.

On Our Backs: You'll have to record a live album someday.

AM: I think that's going to be the next step. It'd be fun to do that kind of an album. And I'd also like to do another more straight-up acoustic album similar to *Out of Control*, with the slide [guitar]. Lea Delaria once said to me, "You need to record a slide guitar album called *Blues Walkin' Like a Man*," which is a Robert Johnson song. I have lots of ideas; it's a matter of getting funding together. I raised \$23,000 to make the CD myself. I don't owe anybody any money. It was all gifts or investments. And the thought of starting that process all over again is grueling.

But I feel privileged to be a musician, even though I'm always broke. And I have been broke since I was 19. Everything I own has been given to me: my computer, everything in my apartment. And sometimes I want plates that match. I really feel privileged to be able to do what I do and express myself in this world. But man, there are some trade-offs.

On Our Backs: OK. So what would your ideal world of sex look like?

AM: I would live in a really big house. [laugh] And I'd have a nice play space in that house, both a music space and a sexual space. Because creativity is so related to the sex drive to me. And that there were several people whom I was involved with that would stop by now and then and have some fun. We'd love each other and there wouldn't be a whole lot of fucking processing! And if I were to get married, it would be a nonconventional type partnership. But I wouldn't mind a big wedding. I wouldn't mind walking a beautiful woman down the aisle in a beautiful dress.

And you know what one of my other sexual fantasies is?

On Our Backs: What?

AM: For them to come out with an antidepressant...

On Our Backs: That doesn't dampen your libido?

AM: Right! I think it's a ruse. I think it's because they don't want those of us who have depression to procreate.

On Our Backs: So tell me about what living in Atlanta is like.

AM: Atlanta is a very busy city right now; it's a boom town. But Atlanta's not really the South in a way. And there's lots of great restaurants here. That would be part of my sexual fantasy too.

On Our Backs: How so?

AM: Just to take a beautiful girl or a good-looking boy to a restaurant and feed him, and take him home, and fuck his brains out. ☺

Angela Motter's CD, *Pleasure and Pain*, can be ordered from her Web site: www.angelamotter.com. Or write Hey MISTER! Records, P.O. Box 5543, Atlanta GA 31107.

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