

Amy Helm, 2022

Her voice, first. Amy Helm has a voice of a thousand ways, twists and turns, ascensions and intentions. It soars, flays, pleads, celebrates, guides, heals, teaches, and above all Amy Helm's voice makes you feel. Her own emotion enables and encourages the lids and layers to come off your own, as you listen to her on a recording, or in performance. This alone would be enough; but Helm has been much more than a singer for a long time. After decades of practicing and perfecting her arts, Helm has shaped herself into a unique force, personality, and woman in the world of music—and the far wider world of all who love music.

Helm was born in Woodstock, New York, in December 1970. By the middle of the 20th century, Woodstock was the home to prominent and progressive musicians. One of them was Amy's father, Levon Helm, whose voice and drums powered bands including the one that needed no other name than The Band. Levon's father Diamond Helm, a self-taught Arkansas musician, encouraged his son and his son's bandmates, too. Amy Helm's mother, Libby Titus, is a singer-songwriter; Mack Rebennack, "Dr. John," was Amy's stepfather in the 1970s, and Donald Fagen of Steely Dan is Titus's husband now. Helm's first public performance was with Dr. John at the Lone Star in New York City when she was a child, singing harmony on "Come On Baby, Let the Good Times Roll." Helm has shared a stage with them all, and chiefly with her father in his bands of the 1990s and 2000s. These are the rich roots from which a mighty and individual performer has come.

Amy Helm's early days in ensembles, and learning from many artists, engendered in her two vast strengths: her capabilities as a performer, and her power as a collaborator and teacher. The blended talents of her New York City-based band Ollabelle, formed in 2001, show just how broad and deep Helm's musical knowledge and abilities go. Helm works in rich and varied styles in the music she records, and makes. "Sing To Me," the first song she wrote herself, is a perfect illustration of both her lyric and lyrical abilities. It is a slow air, a blues plea, a soul celebration, and a swinging, gently rocking stroll all at once.

Amy's first solo albums, *Didn't It Rain* (2015) and *This Too Shall Light* (2018), are a diptych, showing two views of a remarkable woman and what she can do. Her debut album was recorded at home in Woodstock, and in the company of bandmates and friends: Catherine Russell, Larry Campbell, Teresa Williams, Brian Mitchell, Elizabeth Mitchell, Daniel Littleton, Byron Isaacs, and more. For her second album, Helm went to Los Angeles and worked with Joe Henry, covering songs by artists as varied as Odetta, Rod Stewart, and Blossom Dearie, showcasing her own infinite vocal variety—and spreading her singing wings. *What The Flood Leaves Behind* (2021) combines the strengths fostered in Helm in the Hudson Valley, and by musicians she has known and performed with for decades, with her own increasingly formidable writing and singing. From "Verse 23," psalm-based gospel gold written for Helm by M.C. Taylor of Hiss

Golden Messenger, to “Terminal B,” her own sexy, kinky celebration of a mystery man in California, the whole record shows the triumphant path Helm is on now.

Catch her when you can, because Amy Helm is in constant motion these days. Writing and recording new songs, on the road again, organizing the annual Dirt Farmer music festival, and curating at Levon Helm Studios a monthly series of Midnight Rambles, she is a woman of seemingly boundless energy and passions. Asked what she wants from her career now, Helm replies, “I want what I think every artist wants at our core, continued creative expression as the ultimate freedom. To hold it because it’s our calling and our birthright.” That Helm is choosing, as she lives her life, to share that expression and freedom, to share her own birthright freely and gladly with so many others, is a benediction.