

# Mp3 Billy X. Curmano John Pendergast - Amanita (aminita)



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Atmospheric and sweet, but never saccharine, acoustic folk jazz with dulcimer, guitar, harmonica, mbira and voice. 11 MP3 Songs FOLK: Folk Blues, JAZZ: Smooth Jazz Details: BILLY X. CURMANO AND JOHN PENDERGAST "Amanita" The story behind the sweet, but never saccharine, accoustic folk jazz sound that is Amanita stems from a collaboration that has always been more about texture and atmosphere than notes and keys. Billy X. Curmano and John Pendergast play as one voice. They don't require stacks of amplification. Their's is a quieter more meditative free space. Sometimes, it seems, they almost compete for the softest, purest tones. As much as music, they explore the silence, subtly and space between sounds - so quietly, in fact, that Amanita is the first of two CD's recorded in the basement of a Connecticut home, while the family slept upstairs. The origins of their union makes for an interesting tale. A tale of how a musical primitive and a seasoned player can push each other's limits. Journalists have dubbed Billy X., "The Court Jester of Southeastern Minnesota" and compared him to P.T. Barnum, Andy Warhol and Marcel DuChamp. That reputation is well earned from an eccentric intermedia style that has continually mixed traditional and not-so-traditional art with sounds and music in exhibitions, films, happenings and performances. John began playing guitar at an early age. His father arranged guitar lessons with the television band leader Joe Shott of the Hot Shots when he was only 11. He went on to study violin and voice and turned professional playing regularly at Milwaukee clubs. One of Billy's two day improvisational performance events in the streets of uptown Minneapolis probably gave birth to "Amanita". Billy gathered a troupe of singers, dancers and musicians to open his solo exhibition at the Dean Gallery. While collecting performers, the name of (by all reports) a very hot musician with a van was bandied about. Mary Swokowski introduced Billy to John Pendergast and, though things are a bit foggy, John's first words were probably, "I'll play".....And were probably followed by, "I'll drive". Another artist

musician, Michael Klitgaard, joined the motley crew and they made their way to a farm house just west of Minneapolis. For the next few days and nights, they made hit and run guerrilla style musical assaults on the city. After playing in the streets, partying and playing at the farm, and then playing and sleeping in the hay loft, Billy Curmano, John Pendergast and Michael Klitgaard formed what became the unbookable outlaw band, FLY AGARIC. The trio performed a sort of acoustic folk jazz just about anywhere they weren't booked. They played guerrilla gigs that fit the times. Their Fly Music carried them into the streets, student unions, parties, pedestrian malls, bluff tops and fast food parking lots. They toured in the Fly Van. Sometimes playing late into the night and pulling over to sleep in a state park or rest stop. At daybreak one sunny morning, they awoke and stepped out to find a field of Amanita Muscaria mushrooms greeting them. Even when a promoter noticed the crowd they had drawn and approached them to play at his club, they just laughed. For some strange reason, they avoided paying gigs. Occasionally, the police interrupted their sweet, but never saccharine, sounds. A Milwaukee D.J. convinced them to record for the WUWM radio audience. Now, the Fly Agaric ground rules generally called for a late night start. Maybe it was the wine. Maybe it was something else, but after Michael got a look at the pristine studio he said, "I'm not playing in there". Of course, as was often the case, John said, "I'll play." The engineers saved the night with a compromise. They found keys to the acoustically sound Fine Arts Theatre and set up for the portable-studio, single mike recordings that became known as the FLY TAPES. After some radio and television play, select cuts were preserved on the sound track of, "Tiger Cage Sequence", and in the XART Audio Archives. The three went their separate ways, but Billy and John managed to meet up every few years, for old times sake and...just to play. Billy's eccentric performances became evermore eccentric. He was buried alive for three days, fasted for 40 days in Death Valley and swam the entire length of the Mississippi River. He probably picked up a few blue notes as he swam the cotton fields of the deep south. With his long standing experimental music group, The New X Art Ensemble, he's even performed for a herd of cows. Not wanting to miss out on all this fun, John flew in for one of their gigs at the Contemporary in New Orleans. Billy has continued to tour internationally as a soloist, but whenever he plays the East Coast, if at all possible, John has joined him. Together they've played legit gigs at the Cat Club, Ecofest, All Fool's Festival, Grounds For Sculpture and continued their guerilla gigs at Lincoln Center and in the subways of New York. Billy was fortunate to study briefly with the likes of John Cage, Babatunde Olatunji, Joseph Shabalala, Samite and Rachel Rosenthal. On his own, John Pendergast is a

guitarist, violinist, vocalist and arranger that's willing to play anywhere; anytime. He's known for his well earned motto, "I'll play." Besides guerrilla gigs with Billy, John has toured from coast to coast and in between with a long list of bands including the Juggernaut Jug Band. He's as likely to take the stage as one of his alter egos as himself. He's appeared as jug band and rockabilly legends Mr. Hollywood, Colonel Fingers, Johnny Burnout and Johnny Memphis. He's worked prestigious clubs like the Bottom Line and Lone Star in New York City, Milwaukee's Humpin' Hannahs and in plenty of dives and road houses. He's played with Bo Diddley, who adopted him for the night, Vasar Clements and the Manhattan Transfer; drunk whiskey with Stefan Grappelli and chased women with Mose Allison. In September 1999, Billy and John sat back and recorded some New Haven DAT in a single, real-time basement studio session. No tricks, they only edited out a sip or two of brandy between takes. "Amanita": what you hear; is what was played. What doesn't kill you; makes you stronger. For the session, Billy played dulcimer, harmonica, mbira and did some odd vocals. John engineered the project in his basement and provided the sweet strains of a Goya guitar.

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