

Karmin Bio

In April of 2011, Karmin's Amy Heidemann and Nick Noonan ignited the blogosphere when they posted a cover of Chris Brown's "Look At Me Now" on YouTube. The clip instantly went viral, racking up millions of views after being Tweeted by such hip-hop heavy hitters as The Roots' Questlove, producers Diplo and Jermaine Dupree, and rapper The Game, each of whom marveled at the astonishing spectacle of Amy spitting Brown's, Lil Wayne's, and Busta Rhymes' raps at warp speed. Her verbal dexterity alone would be jaw-dropping coming from anyone, never mind a young girl from Nebraska styled like a '40s film star in a black corset and ruby-red lipstick. One critic, writing on MTV.com, raved: "Homegirl is a master emcee. Seriously. Don't let the Charlotte-from-Sex-And-The-City-façade fool you — this girl can THROW. IT. DOWN. No offense, Busta Rhymes, but I think this girl just schooled you."

"People look at Amy and expect her to be a straight-up pop singer, but she busts out a rap and she just slays it," Nick says. "I also think the attitude is what throws people, she completely embodies it." "We hoped that people would like our version, but we didn't expect all this," Amy says of the pandemonium that followed. In short order, the Boston-based duo (who met as freshmen at the prestigious Berklee College of Music) were invited to perform with The Roots at Tufts University and appear on The Ellen DeGeneres Show and On Air With Ryan Seacrest, which led to their subsequent signing with Epic Records, now headed by veteran talent spotter L.A. Reid. "We performed several of our original songs for him live, just us and a piano, and we knew right away," Amy says. "It was something about his energy. He felt music the same way we did."

Although they are already adored by fans around the world for the pop and hip-hop covers they have posted on their YouTube Channel Karmin covers (178 million views and more than 780,000 subscribers as of February), Karmin are ready to show the world what they can do with their own original music. Their first shot across the bow was a high-profile appearance on Saturday Night Live in February, during which they showcased two new songs: the irresistibly addictive current single "Brokenhearted" and the blazing, rap-fueled "I Told You So." "Doing SNL was totally surreal," Nick says. "We grew up watching the show so to have been asked to perform was completely mind-blowing."

"Brokenhearted," which Amy says tells the story of how she and Nick first met, and "I Told You So" are just two of the stellar tracks that appear on the duo's upcoming debut album, Hello, which Amy describes as "an introduction to Karmin. It's a new sound — we like to call it 'swag-pop.' You're going to hear the catchy hooks and the crazy rap verses with lots of wordplay. There's humor, but there are deep, meaningful messages buried within the playfulness. I think people will be really entertained by it."

Working with such top-notch hitmakers as Claude Kelly, Stargate, Tricky Stewart, Dr. Luke, Jon Jon, and The Runners, Hello showcases Karmin's versatility and far-reaching talent. Nick delivers bright harmonies and skilled accompaniment on piano, guitar, and even trombone (he's a trained jazz trombonist) to Amy — a vocal powerhouse who glides effortlessly from singing to rapping.

"Lauryn Hill is a huge influence as a female artist who both raps and sings," Amy says. "I also love Brandy, Alicia Keys, Gwen Stefani, Christina Aguilera, and Alanis Morissette, although her album had a parental guidance sticker on it, so I wasn't allowed to own it growing up. I would sit

there with my tape recorder when Casey Kasem came on with the Top 40 and record her music off the radio."

Both Amy and Nick were raised modestly in small towns, which probably accounts for their down-to-earth friendliness. Amy grew up in Seward, Nebraska (pop. 6,000). Her mother is a first-grade teacher and her father sells fiberglass and storm-damage supplies. "My dad plays guitar and would have loved to be the fifth member of The Beatles," says Amy, who discovered her own voice in sixth grade after performing for her classmates who thought she was lip-synching. "I remember when [Swedish singer] Robyn's debut album came out and thinking, 'Oh, white girls can sing soul. It's okay that I sound like this.' Because growing up in Nebraska, everyone listened to country music." Amy was accepted to Berklee on a scholarship to study songwriting, performance, and business, and worked as a wedding singer at night and on weekends. "My mom was like, 'You're going to make \$125 a night singing with a wedding band in Boston?' It was like I'd made it."

Meanwhile, Nick, a chiropractor's son from Old Town, Maine (pop. 7,840), was working his way through his parents' collection of classic rock albums, everyone from Billy Joel and Elton John to The Beatles, Queen, and The Doors. When he was required to learn an instrument in fourth grade, he chose trombone because no one else did. "My big thing was I could play really high, loud, and fast, especially for a little guy," he recalls. After winning several awards, Nick was also accepted to Berklee on a scholarship. He performed with such luminaries as Paul Simon and Herbie Hancock and seriously considered becoming a professional Jazz trombonist. After the two graduated, Amy tried her luck with a girl group and kept performing as a wedding singer until it finally dawned on her and Nick that they should be making music together.

"We were like, 'We've tried all these different things, we should really just do something ourselves because nobody is ever going to care as much about our music as we do,'" Amy says. With Amy playing a guitar her dad had gotten at a pawn shop and Nick banging out the rhythms on a wooden box because they couldn't afford a drum kit, Karmin began writing their own songs — acoustic-driven hip-hop originals — before they decided to try to grab people's attention by re-arranging the biggest hits of the day — songs by everyone from Adele and Lady Gaga to Kanye West and Eminem — each week on YouTube. When Karmin's version of Nicki Minaj's "Super Bass" earned them their biggest response yet, they thought the time was right to take on "Look At Me Now." "I was drawn to the speed of the rapping, but also the swag," Amy says. "It's not tangible, but there's space in the music that just feels so good."

Now Karmin are bringing that feeling to their own music. "A few months ago, we were sitting in our living room with a wooden box and a guitar just writing raw music, now we're performing on Saturday Night Live and getting ready to release our debut album," Amy marvels. Adds Nick: "I remember Amy's dad once saying that the only CD he'd ever bought and run home from the store to listen to was by The Beatles. We want our music to have that effect on people. We want to shake things up."