

ROUNDER RECORDS ARTIST BIO

Claire Lynch

Whatcha Gonna Do

Street Date: September 15, 2009

Claire Lynch is excited. "I am out right now playing the best music of my career with the best band of my career." Her new album *Whatcha Gonna Do* confirms this. One listen, and you'll agree that this groundbreaking artist is at the top of her game.

Claire Lynch has a band that knocks audiences out wherever she goes, and her new album brims over with powerful songs, extraordinary vocals, and top-of-the-line musicianship.

Who wouldn't be excited?

The Atlanta Journal Constitution tagged Claire "the perfect mix of that famed trio Linda Ronstadt, Emmylou Harris and Dolly Parton. She's got the interpretive skills of Ronstadt, the clear and pure voice of Harris and the bluegrass soul of Parton." To hear Claire with her band, live or recorded, is to experience bluegrass, folk swing and country adroitly mixed with charm, mastery, and signature innovation. With a band consisting of Jim Hurst (guitar, banjo, vocals), Mark Schatz (bass, clawhammer banjo) and Jason Thomas (fiddle, mandolin, vocals) you've got a spectacular combination.

When asked what it's like to share the stage with three musicians of such a high caliber Claire says, "My heart swells with pride, first of all. They're sort of unassuming – so I just love to watch the audience's reaction to their instrumental virtuosity and phenomenal musicality."

With *Whatcha Gonna Do* Claire takes "a little bit of a different approach" from past albums. "We wanted to keep it sparse. We tried to distill it down to the best of what just the four of us have to offer. I think the album, as a result, has its own heart."

A new Claire Lynch album does more than herald the arrival of a new collection of stellar vocals and tight, tasteful arrangements. Each of her albums has also showcased Claire's remarkable taste in songs. *Whatcha Gonna Do* is no exception.

Kicking off with the life-affirming "Great Day In The Mornin'," the album moves into two songs brilliantly built around metaphors. "Highway," which Claire wrote with Irene Kelly when both women were in "difficult circumstances," takes us down a road of love's uncertainties that many of us have traveled. "The Mockingbird's Voice" is devastating as it indicts a wayward lover.

"Face to Face," another original (written with Donna Ulisse) displays that acoustic swing sound that has become one of Claire's signatures, while describing, in a compellingly off-beat way, what we might expect when we meet our Maker.

Jesse Winchester's "That's What Makes You Strong" is a lesson in logic that has a lot to say about vulnerability and trust, delivered as a sultry duet between Claire and the songwriter. "The CLB did a gig with [Winchester] in Florida at a festival and we were smitten with his live show. He was also smitten with our band. We've done some other concerts together and I've sung on his recent record too. It's kind of a mutual admiration."

"Whatcha Gonna Do" keeps us on a philosophical path – this time the one between right and wrong. Mark Schatz's bass gets "Crazy Train" off to a rocking start, and the song never lets up, featuring burning solos by Jason Thomas on fiddle and Jim Hurst on guitar. "A Canary's Song" holds out hope, whether in the darkness of a



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mine or in the striving for a better life. Bill Monroe's "My Florida Sunshine" accentuates the "blue" in bluegrass. The old timey feeling of the sad tale "Widow's Weeds" is firmly established by Mark Schatz's clawhammer banjo.

Susan Werner's "Barbed Wire Boys" is a tribute to the old fashioned sacrifice and devotion exhibited by the men of the older generation. "When I heard it for the first time, it was one of those moments where my ears were glued to it and it was total concentration and then I stood up and paced the room; 'Oh my God, Oh my God.' I love it when a song does that to me. My dad, a data systems analyst, was in the Navy during the end of World War II, and had that attitude of sacrifice like so many men of his generation. I think it's sort of a lost attitude."

Claire closes out the album with the haunting "Woods of Sipsy" with its prayer-like tranquility and quiet reassurance. She wrote the song about "Granny," her grandmother-in-law, "the one who indoctrinated me into genteel Southern living. She lived in the backwoods of central Alabama. It's just sort of a forbidding feeling that you get there. She taught me about their attitude, which is – we don't need city – we don't need outsiders – we like it the way it is here. We thrive on the way life has been and it doesn't need to change. But there she found beauty and rest, and she found fulfillment in those woods."

Growing up in the New York town of Kingston, Claire found that music came naturally. "My mother liked show tunes. My family was involved in church; it was a big part of our lives. And so there was church music. I had two sisters who also sang – we all sang, around the table at dinner, or in the car...anywhere." She jokes that her family had "a song for every occasion."

When she was twelve, Claire's family moved to Alabama "and everything turned upside down – socially and in a lot of other aspects. I began my education in country music. I wasn't hit with bluegrass until I was graduating high school." By this time the "counter-culture" had taken hold in America, with its values of simplicity and respect for nature. "When I encountered bluegrass I was really struck with the fact that it was self-sufficient and organic. As John Hartford said 'It don't need an amp and it don't plug in.' I thought that was really cool."

Claire has played a role in bluegrass and country music since the mid 1970s when she joined a band called Hickory Wind, soon to become the Front Porch String Band. When the band took a 10-year break starting in 1981, Claire kept a hand in the music business both as a songwriter and as a session vocalist. Her songs have been recorded by Patty Loveless, Cherryholmes, Kathy Mattea, the Whites, and the Seldom Scene. Her vocals have graced recordings by Emmylou Harris, Dolly Parton, Linda Ronstadt, Patty Loveless, Pam Tillis, Kathy Mattea, Jesse Winchester, Sara Watkins and Ralph Stanley.

Born in Kentucky, raised in Ohio, Jim Hurst got his first guitar when he was four years old. He must have started playing immediately; that's one way to explain how good he is. His influences also undoubtedly contribute to his astonishing abilities on the instrument. He names Clarence White, Doc Watson, Merle Travis and Chet Atkins, but considers Jerry Reed to be his biggest influence. Jim has twice been named IBMA Guitar Player of the Year, and is a sought-after Nashville studio musician. In addition to his work with Claire Lynch, he has backed The McCarter Sisters, Holly Dunn, Trisha Yearwood and Sara Evans, and also released several solo albums.

Two-time IBMA Bass Player of the Year, Mark Schatz has worked with a wide variety of artists, including Béla Fleck, Jerry Douglas, Maura O'Connell, Tony Rice, John Hartford, Emmylou Harris, Linda Ronstadt, Tim & Mollie O'Brien and Nickel Creek. In addition to his bass playing, Mark is known for his skills on clawhammer banjo and at Southern Appalachian clog dancing. He has released several solo recordings on Rounder.

Jason Thomas was born in North Bay, Ontario, Canada, and began playing the mandolin at the age of eight. He picked up the violin at twelve, and in high school began to play guitar, banjo, bass and viola. Along the way to his current career as a touring musician, Jason won the Canadian Open Mandolin Championship and twice won the Florida State Championship on both fiddle and mandolin. A former member of the highly esteemed band, Kane's River, he enjoys playing in a wide variety of styles, including Celtic, country, Gypsy jazz, folk, Cajun and Western Swing.



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