



Claire Lynch offers bluegrass music a chance to adapt, grow, influence



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When music luminaries Dolly Parton, Emmylou Harris and Linda Ronstadt, among others, sing your praises, literally, that's a good time to re-evaluate your artistry.

Bluegrass songstress Claire Lynch (she of the warm, sweet soprano) doesn't take the plugs lightly, especially when Patty Loveless, Pam Tillis and Kathy Mattea also revere her. All of the above have recorded with her, covered her songs or touted her talents.

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"I'm extremely proud," Ms. Lynch says by phone from east Tennessee. "It's been a career booster. It's helped me to believe that I actually had something to offer. To have their endorsement I had to take a second look at my contributions to music. You can leave a legacy. Maybe you can influence the further evolution of bluegrass music."

She already has. Ms. Lynch joins Alison Krauss and Rhonda Vincent as one of the pioneering women who have redirected the genre away from the salt-and-vinegar male image cemented by bluegrass legends Bill Monroe and Ralph Stanley. They've given the organic musical style a new face, one willing to adapt and grow with the times.

Rounder Records
Ms. Lynch takes a fearless approach to refashioning songs.

As a vocalist, songwriter and bandleader, the Poughkeepsie, N.Y., native has long merged bluegrass with elements of country, folk and swing. Her graceful take on the sound can be heard on 2007's *Crowd Favorites*, a collection of career highlights as well as four rerecorded versions of songs from her early days in the Front Porch String Band, which began with the name Hickory Wind.

Her latest studio album, 2006's *New Day*, features a cover of Mac McAnally's "Only Passing Through," a beautifully melodic ballad that borrows from folk and pop as much as it does from country. The tune serves as a clear example of Ms. Lynch's fearless approach to refashioning songs into bluegrass.

But she quickly addresses the purists who dismiss anything that deviates from the old-fashioned norm.

"There's almost a close-mindedness to people who want to judge and horn in traditional bluegrass," she says. "It stifles creativity. Why not bring that to an acoustic setting and still honor the tradition? There is another side of bluegrass. It is pure. It's contained. It's not electrified. There's so much there to build upon."

The construction continues – Ms. Lynch is currently working on her follow-up to *New Day*.

"I'm not in the studio yet, but I'm in the organization process," she says. "The more organization you put in the front end makes the rest of the process go much smoother. I'm trying to get the songs ready to take to the band and begin the recording."

She wants to write several originals for the disc. But she's been busy with mom duties, such as helping her daughter move out of her college dorm after finishing her first year of studies.

"This has been a really incredible year, and I haven't written as much as I've wanted to. But I have at least four songs of my own. I have writing appointments, and I'd like to have half of the CD be my songs."

That's important to her, and to all the women who make bluegrass music.

"We've got to have our voices be heard."