

THE HOUSTON PRESS

Fire on the Strings Bluegrass Festival, featuring The Claire Lynch Band

By John Nova Lomax

Published: May 15, 2008

About 13 years ago, on a deep dark summer night, I was perhaps unwisely attempting to coax a 1979 Malibu Classic station wagon up and over Monteagle Mountain, halfway between Chattanooga and Nashville in southeastern Tennessee. I was tuned in to AM-650, WSM, the "air castle of the South," and the Grand Ole Opry was in full swing.

The master of ceremonies introduced an Alabama lady named Claire Lynch, and her band launched into "Wabash Cannonball." The night was transformed; even in my treacherous ascent of the Cumberland Plateau, I no longer cared about the jingle, jangle and roar coming from my Malibu's tired old motor. I was simply consumed with Lynch's incredible voice soaring over the sizzling of her band's strings, cutting right through the static all the way from distant Nashville.

Mountain music always sounds better in the mountains, and since those are in short supply around here, Lynch is playing this gig deep in the pines instead. The two-time bluegrass Grammy nominee performs two Saturday sets at the Fire on the Strings Bluegrass Festival at the KOA campground in Montgomery that was formerly known as Haven's Landing. The festival also features Audie Blaylock & Redline and Robert Hale & Wildfire, guitar and banjo contests, RV hookups, cabins for overnight stays, and lots more.

As for Lynch — talk about taking her show on the road. Later this summer, her touring schedule takes her from Alabama all the way to the flippin' Yukon. I hope she's not trying to cover all those miles in a Malibu wagon.