

Claire Lynch Moonlighter



It would be futile indeed to attempt to categorize Claire's music. Which is a blessing in itself, simply because her music, her sound, her voice — they are hers and hers alone.

Her vocal timbre is innately smooth and effortless, her pitch impeccable. Her ornaments and embellishments are not arbitrarily chosen but are strategically placed with deliberation.

I think this album is an extension of her last, itself an expression of her heart and soul — a soul grounded to a firm foundation. A most precious form of American music.

Tony Rice

Nashville's best kept bluegrass secret is out. The release of this album marks Claire Lynch's leap into national prominence. For the past 20 years she has plied her trade with quiet strength — recording for small and/or regional labels and slowly building a reputation as a songwriter of impressive depth and a singer of brilliant clarity.

Until now that reputation has spread mainly by word of mouth among her peers — Emmylou Harris, Kathy Mattea, Dolly Parton, Patty Loveless, John Starling, Linda Ronstadt and the rest of the musicians who have helped Claire along the way. They've led the cheering section for this phenomenal talent.

"Nashville knows me," says Claire with a shy, captivating lilt in her voice. "The recording community knows me. But now I think I finally have a good chance for selling records. Whenever I meet people who say, 'I am a big fan,' I always think, 'How do they know me? Where have they heard me?'"

To know her music, you have to be a pretty dedicated fan, one with a "seek and ye shall find" approach. Claire Lynch is based in the tiny North Alabama town of Hazel Green, about two hours south of Music City. For years, she and her Front

Porch String Band wandered through the cities of Central Tennessee and Northern Alabama, warming the clubs and festivals of the region with her silvery voice and their shimmering playing. Live appearances were the calling cards for the group's series of albums, usually recorded in out-of-the-way studios for hard-to-find record companies.

But when you're born to write and sing, talent has a way of finding an audience.

As a child, Claire learned to sing harmonies with her sisters in a trio. In her teens she picked up guitar to emulate the "fair and tender maidens" of the folksong revival. In her late teens she was deeply inspired by The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band's landmark *Will the Circle Be Unbroken* album of 1972. Then she heard her first bluegrass band and was totally smitten.

"It was the McLain Family Band and I've never forgotten it. That banjo, I'm telling you. I had never heard anything like it in my life. It blew my mind. It just drew me in. I was mesmerized. That upright bass was so cool. And it was all acoustic — I thought, 'This is really neat; this is something. I like a lot.' And then came my big infatuation with Larry. He was in a bluegrass band and I had a crush

on him. I guess I would have been a bluegrass groupie if I didn't sing."

Multi-instrumentalist Larry Lynch was a student at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa when he formed Hickory Wind in 1973. When his bride-to-be joined the band, its sound became magical. Everyone became so excited that all of the members left college to make music full time. Claire quit her job as an insurance underwriter.

"It was just being a glorified secretary. Besides I was 19 and had nothing but ideals. So I quit my job and joined a bluegrass band. I hadn't even considered the money. I was just into my musical ideals."

The group landed a "house band" job in Birmingham and renamed themselves The Front Porch String Band. For the next three years they played nightly, polishing their skills to an increasingly lustrous sheen. In 1975 Larry borrowed \$1,000 and made the first Front Porch String Band album, *Smilin' at You*. A year later, six hours in a studio resulted in *Country Rain*. The first LP was self-marketed. The second was for a short-lived label called Lanark. Both sank without a ripple.

But at a festival appearance The Front Porch String Band met John Starling. The

former Seldom Scene mainstay had moved to Alabama and was looking for musical soulmates.

"He took us under his wing," recalls Claire. "He kind of adopted us. And then it started, in the living room, the education about dynamics, fills, breaks, when to shut up, how to respect the singer, showmanship. He was having a blast and we were learning so much. There was so much growth with John. People could hear it. He was our mentor."

The Front Porch String Band recorded again in 1981, the same year that Claire Lynch recorded her first solo album, *Breakin' It*. This time, the distributor was better, the bigger Leather/Ambush bluegrass company. But by then the band was exhausted by eight years of nonstop work with no real reward to show for it. They called it quits.

For Lynch, the retirement was short-lived. Starling introduced her to Nashville songwriter Paul Craft. The Music Row tunesmith took an interest in her writing and urged Kathy Mattea to record "Hills of Alabama" and Patty Loveless to sing "Some Morning Soon." Producer Tony Brown played piano on Starling's 1982 LP *Waitin' on a Southern Train*. He heard Claire's backup vocals for Starling and

then her *Breakin' It* LP. In short order she was commuting to Nashville to sing back-up on records by Loveless, Karen Staley, Irene Kelley and Skip Ewing.

Emmylou Harris, Linda Ronstadt and Dolly Parton followed suit during the next decade, as word about the striking voice of Claire Lynch began to spread in Nashville. By this time, The Front Porch String Band had long since re-formed. But outside careers, young children and home life had kept things on a fairly local basis for about six years.

Most people didn't even know the band was back together. To reestablish itself, a new album was recorded in 1991. This marked another rung up on the bluegrass ladder. *Lines and Traces* was issued by the mainstream bluegrass label Rebel Records, which also reissued the 1981 effort *The Front Porch String Band*. After 18 years in the business, a segment of the listening public was getting to know this woman's remarkable music for the first time.

In 1992 Claire was offered her first Music Row staff songwriting contract. Stephanie Davis recorded "Moonlighter" and dazzled thousands with it as the opening act for Garth Brooks in 1993. A Claire Lynch gospel album called *Friends*

for a Lifetime was released by the Brentwood label later that year. It won rave reviews in *Billboard*, *Music Row*, *The Tennessean*, *Bluegrass Unlimited* and elsewhere. One track, "Between the Two of Them," later became a hit single for Tanya Tucker.

Clearly, it is time for a major breakthrough. You are holding it in your hands.

As you might expect, the elite of Nashville's instrumental community dropped by to augment The Front Porch String Band sound when the time arrived to record this long-overdue album. Such stellar pickers as Bela Fleck, Jerry Douglas, Alison Brown, Glen Duncan, Ronny McCoury, Thom Bresh and Sam Bush joined bandmembers Claire, Larry, Ronnie Simpkins and Kenny Smith in sessions that can only be described as inspired. By the way, Michael McLain, banjoist of the McLain Family Band (the band that had originally inspired Claire's move into bluegrass), has since joined The Front Porch String Band lineup.

This is music to set your mind dancing, to free your spirit and to melt your heart. There are five Claire Lynch originals here, including the brilliantly crafted "Moonlighter" and the downright funky "Children of Abraham." Elsewhere she

tosses off the Cajun sizzler "Thibodaux," the sweet love story of "Pee Wee and Fern" and the yearning honky-tonk waltz "My Heart Is a Diamond" with equal finesse.

Claire Lynch has the wonderful ability to sound simultaneously as fragile as a cloud wisp yet as forceful as an incoming gale. Her voice bends and springs like a leaf that has been poured on one moment and bathed in sunshine the next. It can convey total tenderness. But there's a taut, tensile strength here, too.

This is singing that will stay in your memory. These are songs that will stick to your ribs. This is a record that will nourish your soul.

This one's a keeper.

"I kind of feel like my life is just beginning," says Claire Lynch. She may be right, for this stunning collection is the kind of thing that makes critics break into applause, award givers take note and fans spread the word.

For years on Music Row they've been whispering, "have you heard Claire Lynch?" That whisper is about to turn into a shout.

Robert K. Oermann
Nashville, Tennessee

"Second Wind"

Claire Lynch • vocal
David Grier • acoustic guitar
Gene Libbea • bass
Larry Lynch • mandolin
Alison Brown • banjo
Randy Howard • fiddle
Jerry Douglas • dobro
Kenny Smith & Chuck Holcomb • harmony vocals

"Life Without You"

Claire Lynch • vocal
Pat McInerney • drums
David Grier • acoustic guitar
Dave Pomeroy • bass
Sam Bush • mandolin
Bela Fleck • banjo
Randy Howard • fiddle
Jerry Douglas • dobro
Jeff White & Kenny Smith • harmony vocals

"We Should Only Have Time For Love"

Claire Lynch • vocal
Pat McInerney • drums
Steven Sheehan • acoustic guitar
Dave Pomeroy • bass
Adam Steffey • mandolin
Randy Howard • fiddle
Jerry Douglas • dobro, lap steel

Hershey Reeves & Kathy Chiavola •

harmony vocals

"Moonlighter"

Claire Lynch • vocal
Pat McInerney • drums
David Grier • acoustic guitar
Dave Pomeroy • bass
Sam Bush • mandolin
Bela Fleck • banjo
Jerry Douglas • lap steel
Hershey Reeves & Kathy Chiavola • harmony vocals

"Children of Abraham"

Claire Lynch • vocal
Kenny Malone • drums
David Grier • acoustic guitar
Ronnie Simpkins • bass
Larry Lynch • mandolin
Glen Duncan • fiddle
Rob Ickes • dobro
Kenny Smith • lead guitar
Dennis Parker & Kenny Smith • harmony vocals

"Pee Wee and Fern"

Claire Lynch • vocal
Pat McInerney • drums
David Grier • acoustic guitar
Gene Libbea • bass

Larry Lynch • mandolin
Randy Howard • fiddle
Kenny Smith & Chuck Holcomb • harmony vocals

"Bring Back The Good Times"

Claire Lynch • vocal
Kenny Malone • drums
Glen Duncan • fiddle
Alison Brown • banjo
Ronnie Simpkins • bass
David Grier • acoustic guitar
Kenny Smith • lead guitar
Larry Lynch • mandolin
Dennis Parker & Kenny Smith • harmony vocals

"Thibodaux"

Claire Lynch • vocal
Pat McInerney • drums, tambourine
Kenny Smith • guitar solo
David Grier • acoustic guitar
Dave Pomeroy • bass
Ronny McCoury • mandolin
Randy Howard • fiddle
Joe Rogers • squeeze box
Kenny Smith & Chuck Holcomb • harmony vocals

"My Heart Is A Diamond"

Claire Lynch • vocal
Pat McInerney • drums
Kenny Smith • guitar fills
Steven Sheehan • acoustic guitar
Dave Pomeroy • bass
Ronny McCoury • mandolin
Randy Howard • fiddle
Kenny Smith & Jeff White • harmony vocals

"Alabama State Of Mind"

Claire Lynch • vocal
David Grier • acoustic guitar
Gene Libbea • bass
Larry Lynch • mandolin
Alison Brown • banjo
Jerry Douglas • dobro
Kenny Smith & Chuck Holcomb • harmony vocals

"Further In The Hole"

Claire Lynch • vocal
Thom Bresh • acoustic guitar
Gene Libbea • bass
Larry Lynch • mandolin
Randy Howard • fiddle
Mike Dowling • harmony vocal

- Second Wind** 3:05
(Claire Lynch-Pamela Brown Hayes/ Songs of Polygram International Publishing, Inc.-Sound Cell Songs, BMI)
- Life Without You** 2:50
(Keith Little-H. Waller III/Slate Mountain Music, BMI)
- We Should Only Have Time For Love** 3:22
(Jim Rushing-Wayland Patton/ Poly-gram International Publishing, Inc., BMI)
- Moonlighter** 4:31
(Claire Lynch/Songs of Polygram International Publishing, Inc.-Sound Cell Songs, BMI)
- Children of Abraham** 2:59
(Claire Lynch-Larry Lynch/Songs of Polygram International Publishing, Inc.-Sound Cell Songs, BMI-Designer Music, SESAC, a division of Brentwood Music, Inc.)
- Me Wee and Fern** 2:51
(Mel Beshar-Harley Allen/Warner Tamerlane Publishing Corp., Inc.-Randy Scruggs Music-Coburn Music, BMI)
- Bring Back The Good Times** 2:39
(Claire Lynch-Kevin Williamson/ Songs of Polygram International Publishing, Inc.-Sound Cell Songs, BMI-Bridge Building Music, BMI, a division of Brentwood Music, Inc.)
- Thibodaux** 3:07
(Chris Stuart/Mountainside Music, BMI)
- My Heart Is A Diamond** 4:02
(Scott Phelps-Sonya Yancy-Steven Sheehan/Phelpsongs-Flying Phoenix-Reynsong, BMI)
- Alabama State of Mind** 2:49
(Claire Lynch-Hershey Reeves/Songs of Polygram International Publishing, Inc.-Sound Cell Songs-Rejoyce Music, BMI)
- Further In The Hole** 2:36
(Randy Handley-Mike Dowling/J. Senter Music, BMI-Pinspotter Music, ASCAP)

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