

New music from Claire Lynch

David Morris | March 28, 2013 | 4 Comments



Compass Records is getting ready to deliver a new CD from the [Claire Lynch Band](#), and if a live performance of many of the songs Monday night in Rockville, MD, is any indication, it's going to be a doozy.

Dear Sister will be available for purchase sometime in April, but don't be surprised if Compass does an unofficial launch in the next few days so the project beats IBMA's March 31 deadline to be considered in this year's awards voting.

It's no small consideration. The album, a couple of songs and the individual members of Claire's band – Mark Schatz on bass, Matt Wingate on guitar and mandolin, and Bryan McDowell on fiddle and mandolin – are all potential contenders. And anytime Claire has a CD on the air, she's a threat to pick up her third female vocalist trophy.

Anyone who has followed Claire over the years knows she's been able to bring top-notch pickers into her bands – think Jim Hurst, Missy Raines and Kenny Smith, among others. But as a band, this lineup is probably the strongest she has fielded.



The band was in top form on a handful of cuts from the new album at the Institute of Musical Traditions show. I haven't heard all of the new material yet, but I have a clear favorite so far – *Dear Sister*, which Claire wrote with Louisa Branscomb. This tear jerker is based on letters written by Louisa's ancestors, who regularly corresponded with their sister back home while they fought – and some died – for the Confederate cause in the Civil War. There's a lot of terrific Civil War music in play for the 150th anniversary of the pivotal year of fighting, and this one is easily in the top echelon.

But there are other gems, too, including *Once the Teardrops Start to Fall*, which Claire wrote with Craig Fuller. That name might be familiar. He was the frontman for Pure Prairie League for many years after a guy named Vince Gill decided to try bluegrass and country.

Another worth listening for when the album comes out is *Doing Time*. It's a song about arson, and as Claire told the sold-out crowd, "You don't hear many of them."

Another thing you don't hear much of at a bluegrass show is swing music. Claire offered a couple Monday night, with Matt trading his Martin for an Eastman archtop. The standout was a Henry Hipkins number, *Stranger Things Have Happened*. There's a lot more of that to come. Claire's next CD for Compass is, at this writing, set to be all swing.



"We do swing music because we love it, and because we can," Claire said. It's part of the anything goes approach that makes every show a bit unpredictable. One night you might hear Matt delivering a knockout rendition of Sting's *She's Too Good For Me*. Another night, like Monday, it's Matt and Claire trading verses on rocker Mark Knopfler's *Sailing to Philadelphia*, a song about the surveyors who put aside their differences long enough to lay out the Mason-Dixon Line. And there's always a hambone routine from Schatz to lighten things up.

Claire trumpeted to soon-to-drop CD several times during the show, gushing at one point, "Saw the artwork today. Getting excited."

If the band's Compass debut after a long run with Rounder Records is anything close to the live performances – and there's no reason with this band and that voice that it shouldn't be – a lot of folks are going to be excited about *Dear Sister*.