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Global Music With a New York Edge

Claire Lynch Brings Her Beautiful Voice and Killer Band to Hill Country

by delarue

If you're a bluegrass fan, you probably know that [Claire Lynch](#) has been a bigtime IBMA winner as a singer. And if you're a bluegrass fan in New York, you probably already know that the former Front Porch String Band frontwoman is playing Hill Country on June 27 at 10:30 PM. The downstairs space there has a powerful PA and it's a ticketed event (\$15), so you won't have to strain to hear over the usual crowds of bellowing tourists. Her latest album with her all-star band, titled *Dear Sister*, finds her on the mellower side of newgrass, more or less. As usual, the picking is strong (and often spectacular), lively conversations abounding between guitarist/mandolinist Matt Wingate, Bryan McDowell (on fiddle, mando and guitar) and banjo player Mark Schatz. Many of the tunes are just flat-out gorgeous, to match the vocals. Lynch's voice is sort of a blend of vintage Dolly Parton and [Amy Allison](#), with a similar nuance and unexpected power when she wants to drive a lyric home.

The opening track, *How Many Moons* is a pop song in disguise: then the backbeat and the dobro and the fiddle kick in and it's a country song. "No one's ever said that I had the patience of a saint," Lynch admits. *Doin' Time*, a duet with Tim O'Brien, is deliciously anthemic, like a vintage Tom Petty song reinvented as bluegrass. *Once the Teardrops Start to Fall* sets a torchy vocal over a growly, bluesy bassline, a vibe that Lynch keeps going strong in *Need Someone*, which is an unabashedly straight-up pop song. The album's centerpiece, a co-write with Louisa Bascomb, is based on letters sent home from the battlefield by Bascomb's Civil War ancestors. Dripping with authenticity, there's an ever-present, bittersweet longing for home; and a crushing subtext that does not bode well for the soldiers.

A brisk remake of the Osborne Brothers' *I'll be Alright Tomorrow*, with a cameo from [Alison Brown](#) on banjo, plays up the angle that the singer might like drinking away her baby more than him actually coming home. Other choice tracks include the slow dobro-fueled ballad *Everybody Knows I've Been Cryin'* and the closing diptych, *Buttermilk Road/The Arbours*, winding up the album on a high note, a rustic fiddle-and-percussion dance hitched to an oldschool bluegrass romp.