

On a recent roll, Claire Lynch headlines Winter Village Bluegrass Festival

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Claire Lynch, who headlines this weekend's Winter Village Bluegrass Festival, has been on a roll lately. Last year, she was named IBMA's Female Vocalist of the Year for the second time, following a similar honor in 2010. She also signed with Compass Records and released a stellar new album "Dear Sister." And she's gearing up for two more projects: a swing album and a Christmas album.

Lynch's ninth album, "Dear Sister" came after a long, drawn-out process of shopping for a label after being with Rounder Records for 18 years. "During that period of time, we had a chance to really arrange the songs the way we wanted them, and we played them out quite a bit before the album came out." Lynch said from her home in Nashville last week.

"It's kind of backwards from the way we usually do it, but by the time we got in the studio we knew exactly what we needed to do."

Originally, she hoped to record some sort of a theme album, but that changed when she came across the song, "Doing Time," written by Al Anderson and Sarah Siskind. "I freaked because I thought it was such a fantastic song, but it did not in one way fit into the themes I was going after," she said. "Bonnie Raitt had had it on hold, but then let it go, and the writers were willing to let me have it. I didn't want to pass up that opportunity, so I decided just to do another collection of great songs."

A native of Kingston, N.Y. (her parents are from Syracuse), Lynch moved to Alabama when she was 12. Her main exposure to southern roots music came via "Hee Haw" and other television programs; she didn't really get exposed to roots music until she was 19 and in college. "I knew some guys from high school that had formed a bluegrass band, and it was through my friendship with them I discovered a whole new world. The 'Will The Circle Be Unbroken' album had come out, and it was captivating. I just loved it."

Lynch's vocals often recall those of Dolly Parton, with whom she has worked and has said of Lynch: "Claire has complemented many of my records with her beautiful harmonies, but she has one of the sweetest, purest and best lead voices in the music business today. I'm so happy to see and hear her shine on her own."

"She is a very generous lady, with every bit as big a heart as it appears she has when you see her in a professional setting," Lynch said of Parton.

The Claire Lynch Band includes some outstanding players: Mark Schatz on bass, Matt Wingate on guitar and Bryan McDowell on fiddle and mandolin. "They can play anything in any key—it's amazing," Lynch said. "A couple of are really young, but they have really old souls."

To learn more, visit www.clairelynch.com