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High Sierra Music Festival :: 07.03.14-07.06.14
Plumas-Sierra County Fairgrounds :: Quincy, CA

Dennis' Saturday Highlights

Ashleigh Flynn & The Back Porch Majority – 1:00-2:30 PM – Grandstand Stage

Everyone smitten with Lucinda Williams, Patty Griffin and Gillian Welch should run, not walk, and immediately spin *A Million Stars*, the latest album from this Portland, Oregon-based singer-songwriter. Taken into the open air at High Sierra in a lovely day-starting Grandstand set, Flynn's newest songs stomped their boots, plucked heart strings and generally charmed the britches off folks. Flynn is funny and slyly sincere, a storyteller able to snag details from the immediate moment, the night before, and whatever else floats into view to forge stage banter filled with off-handed wisdom and earthy understanding – fitting given how her tunes bulge with both traits.

Backed by one of the most intuitively graceful bands at this year's HSMF – **Kathryn Claire** (fiddle, vox), **Jen Forti** (washboard contraption, vox) and **Ted Russell Kamp** (upright bass) – Flynn revealed what a whiskey drinkin' gal with a big heart and a lot of bruised living behind her can do, embracing humanity as it is and not as we might like it to be. I dig her undisguised feminism, which smacks less of what Joan Baez and Gloria Steinem stirred up and seems more interested in simply making sure the contributions of women – particularly the outlaws and rabble-rousers of America's past – aren't forgotten.

Balancing the scales is always a good thing AND an intrinsically American value. "Here's another song about drinking too much booze...and I recommend you do it. Hair of the dog and all that," cracked Flynn, and her observations about the 24/7 nature of things at High Sierra were on-point and often hysterical. Everything about her set and the second set on Sunday in the Big Meadow made me tell the band afterwards, "I could listen to y'all play every day" (especially if they play such a nifty version of John Prine's "Paradise"). So nice in every little way.



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