

Los Angeles Times



POP & HISS

THE L.A. TIMES MUSIC BLOG

Review: Mary Gauthier taps dark and light at McCabe's show



Singer-songwriter Mary Gauthier will appear April 21 at the Grammy Museum in Los Angeles. (Steven Counts)

By Randy Lewis

April 21, 2014 | 2:04 p.m.

Onstage at a sold-out McCabe's in Santa Monica on Saturday night, Mary Gauthier immediately jumped into songs from her forthcoming album, "Trouble & Love," offering up "False From True" and the title track.

Then she explained to the audience that she had decided to bring out the new material at the start "so you wouldn't think the new songs accidentally got happy."

Even before her critically lauded 2005 breakthrough, "Mercy

Now," the Louisiana-born singer and songwriter recorded three albums that shone a light on some of the darkest corners of the human heart, but in a way that ultimately uplifts listeners. Her subsequent albums, "Between Daylight and Dark" in 2007 and "The Foundling" in 2010, are equally powerful collections that landed on many critics' year-end top 10 lists.

"I like the blues," she said Saturday, "but it's good to sing the blues, it really is."

As she told The Times in 2010 about her album "The Foundling," which explored the emotions of her history of being left on the doorstep of a Louisiana orphanage as an infant and then raised by a couple who adopted her: "There's no pain in telling the story for me. The pain was in living the story. But I've survived, so telling it is liberating and healing."

In many ways, her country and folk-rooted material is the antithesis of the feel-good bromides flowing out of today's Nashville. But her razor-sharp eye for detail and her commitment to unsentimental self-reflection puts her in a class with greats such as Kris Kristofferson, John Prine and yes, Bob Dylan. Her songwriting has won fans among fellow musicians who have recorded her songs, including Jimmy Buffett, Blake Shelton and Tim McGraw.

Gauthier is spending a rare chunk of time in Los Angeles because she also is performing and answering questions tonight, April 21, during a session at the Grammy Museum downtown, where she'll go into greater depth about her songwriting with moderator Scott Goldman.

In "When a Woman Goes Cold," the first track from the new album (due June 10), Gauthier captured a world of emotion surrounding a relationship that disintegrated with just a few evocative strokes of her pen:

I must have missed a sign

Or missed a turn somewhere

I looked in her eyes

There was a stranger there

As usual, the darkness in Gauthier's songwriting was leavened by the humor of her between-song comments. She told a story about a fan who waited until she'd signed autographs after a show to question her about "When a Woman Goes Cold," mimicking a deep, foreboding male voice saying, "You *know* her, don't you!"

Her two-hour set, which included a brief guest appearance by rising country singer and songwriter Jaida Dreyer, touched on several of the cornerstones of her repertoire with the same intimacy and insight that makes it easy to understand why a fan would think Gauthier somehow had tapped the heartache in his own life for inspiration.