

# MUSICMARAUDERS

## Anna Tivel & Mama's Broke 4.11.19

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### The Isis Lounge

Asheville, NC

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This past Thursday, Northwest singer songwriter Anna Tivel made her second Asheville tour stop in as many months. After playing the main room at *Isis Music Hall* back in February, she returned to bring her unique brand of folk music to their *Upstairs Lo* as part of a co-bill with Canadian folk duo Mama's Broke. *The Isis Lounge* is a fabulous spot to enjoy live acoustic music. In addition to being one of Asheville's best sounding rooms, its size makes it one of our most intimate as well. As an added bonus, recent Asheville transplant Mimi Naja, of Portland, Oregon's *Fruition*, was on hand to lend her voice and guitar work to Anna's songs. Mimi was an amazing addition to Anna's sound. She seemed to effortlessly read what each song needed from her at any given moment. She knew when to step

up and elevate the song with lead guitar style licks, and she knew when to hold back and add only haunting musical accents. You could tell Anna was happy to have her old friend Mimi along for the ride, even proclaiming at one point, "well that sounded five thousand times better than when I do it by myself."

After opening with "Illinois" off last year's *Small Believer* album, Anna and Mimi launched into a set that consisted of tunes entirely from Ms. Tivel's upcoming album *The Question*. The new batch of songs are quite beautiful. Anna is a poet as much as she is a folk singer. She is one of those songwriters that portrays her song subjects in such a way that even the most minute details seem worthy of your attention. She writes in a manner that leaves the listener feeling like a voyeur observing the characters that inhabit her songs. Whether the subject is a cross-dresser being watched through an apartment window ("The Question") or a janitor sweeping up garbage after a show at *The Georgia Theatre* ("The Velvet Curtain"), she presents them in such a way that as an audience member you find yourself hanging on every word. Of course it doesn't hurt that she tells these stories with the voice of an angel.



As any good folksinger would, Anna also offered her take on current events. On "Fenceline" she took a subject that many of us are sick of hearing about – the border wall – and put her own spin on it. Instead of focusing on the pros and cons of building a wall, she instead told the story of a lone immigrant, beautifully painting a landscape of what might be going through his mind as he tries to cross the border in hopes of a better life for him and his family. She

managed to portray his thoughts so beautifully that her character's story would've been enough to even pull on President Trump's heart strings (if he had any).



Perhaps the most powerful moment of the evening came during Anna's "Homeless Child." Anna explained that she was part of a program called *Lullaby Child* that paired local Portland musicians with new mothers facing various hardships to create lullabies for their children. Anna worked with a mother named Kate and explained the process as "the most powerful thing I ever did." Many songwriters would've been content-sharing the song they wrote for the project, but not Anna. The experience was so powerful for her that she wrote a song about Kate's baby, and she wrote it so beautifully that it brought tears to many eyes in the room.

Going into the show a long time Anna Tivel fan, the second band on the bill – Mama's Broke – was an afterthought. However, after experiencing their set, I was glad they showed up to do their thing. Keeping with the evening's "girl power" theme, Mama's Broke was also a pair of females that were quite enjoyable to watch and listen to.

One of the ladies played fiddle while the other switched between banjo and mandolin. They covered a lot of ground during their short closing set. In the opening three song medley alone, they paired what sounded like a traditional Irish song, a traditional Jewish song and a traditional Bulgarian song. There were times they sounded like they were playing circus music and others that sounded like they were wandering minstrels. Their voices were near perfect companions and their musicianship was equally impressive. It was quite obvious that they were intently playing off one another staring into each other's eyes in an effort to share one musical mind. They effortlessly took turns rotating between lead singer and back-up singer, often times within the same song. There was one song where the tap-dance like stomp of their feet added to the musical landscape. There was another that they played the fiddle together, one traditionally, the other using a pair of chopsticks to hammer along on the fiddle strings. Their set was so enjoyable that they made at least one new fan in the room.

If you consider yourself a fan of folk music, I would recommend checking out both Anna Tivel and Mama's Broke if they happen to pass through your town. Both have a unique sound that makes for an enjoyable live performance. While you are at it, keep your eyes peeled for Anna Tivel's new album *The Question* out on Portland, Oregon's *Fluff & Gravy Records* on April 19.



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