

# MUSICMARAUDERS

## Lindsay Lou: Aiken Bluegrass Fest & Beyond

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### Aiken, South Carolina

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Photos by **Jon Rosenberger** ([PhotoFooFoo](#))

*On Thursday, May 9, Lindsay Lou released two brand new songs. “Keep On Going” and “The Great Defender” on digital platforms everywhere. On Friday, May 10, and Saturday, May 11, Lindsay Lou and her band chose the Aiken Bluegrass Festival (ABF) as the place to celebrate the occasion. At one point during a songwriter’s round robin, the host – Benny “Burle” Galloway – asked if the audience had any questions, and when no one responded he offered up a question of his own, “Hey Lindsay, where are your wings?” I’m assuming he was implying that anyone with a voice as angelic as Lindsay Lou’s must have a pair of wings hiding somewhere. Perhaps those wings also helped her move around the festival grounds so rapidly, as there were times it seemed Lindsay was everywhere at the festival.*

*Somehow in between playing two full sets with her band as well as a handful of guest appearances, Ms. Lou was kind enough to carve out a few minutes to sit down and have a conversation with MusicMarauders. Shortly after her main stage set with her band and, moments before she joined her friends Terrapin Mountain on stage, she sat down with me to discuss her newly released songs, her thoughts on fests like Aiken Bluegrass Festival, and a slew of other topics.*



During her first set of the weekend she likened festivals like ABF to family reunions and added that none are quite like Aiken. I asked her to expand on that thought a little bit. “As a musician, it starts for me with the other musicians. I come and I get to see my friends, my neighbors. We have this musical family. You go through these landmark experiences as people, these things that have big impacts on your life path and then you find yourselves on the same path as those around you, and it’s festivals like this one that bring us all back together.” Adding that “We have a bond. People who have a common interest of music and community are able to come together at places like this. We all have our own little families and year after year those families grow larger and it starts to feel like coming home.”

Recently Lindsay Lou and her longtime band mates Josh Rilko and PJ George have rounded out their sound with drums, and for her sets at ABF they even added keyboards from Mr. Jimmy Rowland. In recent years I’ve heard some bluegrass or acoustic music purists are not thrilled with this new electrified Lindsay Lou sound, but in this writer’s opinion those people couldn’t be more wrong. Not only does the larger band allow more room for Lindsay’s songs to grow and reach a larger audience, but it also sounds pretty freaking good. For those of you that are

bitter about her dropping the “and the Flatbellys” from their name, Lindsay made it absolutely clear where her band mates stand on the name change. “Even though we’re now called Lindsay Lou, we are still very much a band, and this band is a family.”



Lindsay and her family’s first appearance at ABF was Friday evening inside on the Steve’s Hall stage. They hit the ground running with a version of her original song “Sugar” followed by a fantastic take on John’ Prine’s “Pretty Good.” What followed was a seventy-minute set that was a perfect mixture of Lindsay Lou originals as well as some choice covers. Among the covers there was a version of “Long Face” that featured such brilliant key work from Mr. Jimmy that their version sounded like it originated from even deeper in the swamp than Bobby Charles’ original did. They also worked their way through short versions of Grateful Dead’s “Eyes Of The World” and Bill Withers’ “I Wish You Well.”

Despite the more electric configuration of this new band, the bluegrass roots still percolate up fairly often. Josh’s mandolin work on songs like “Satellite” very much hearkened back to the sound of Flatbellys’ early work. The quiet acoustic sounds of “Barely There” put those folks in the “it’s not bluegrass” camp in their place. Another highlight of the set was a cover of Townes Van Zandt’s “Two Hands” in which Mr. Jimmy went completely nuts on his keyboards sending his sounds swirling around the room while Lindsay led the crowd in an old-style gospel sing along. “I got one heart, gonna fill it up with music.” Lindsay Lou and her band were not only filling our hearts with music, but they were also doing their best to use the heat from their stage as a counterbalance to the air conditioning that was pouring from the Steve’s Hall vents.

On Saturday Lindsay and her band found themselves out under the sun as they kicked off the second day of music on the Aiken Stage. In keeping with the gospel feel of their Friday evening set they kicked things off with a version of Rev. Gary Davis’ “I Belong To The Band, Hallelujah!” that had us all feeling like our Sunday morning church services had arrived a day early. The entirety of Saturday’s set had a much more acoustic feel to it, with Josh playing much more mandolin as opposed to the electric guitar heavy Friday evening set. In addition they seemed to use this set to showcase more of their original music instead of relying so heavily on cover songs to fill their set list. We heard versions of “Hot Hands,” “Go There Alone” and set closing version of the aforementioned brand-new tune “Keep On Going.” Which brings me back to what was supposed to be the point of this article – the new songs.

I asked Lindsay why she chose to release the new songs two at a time, instead of the more traditional route of releasing an entire album. “I am releasing them as singles because it seems like something I can do easily. It’s feasible, it’s practical, and it keeps everybody up to date on where we are at at this exact moment,” she said. “I want to constantly be releasing music because I’m growing so much, so fast, that I want to be letting people know what I’m creating now.”

Expanding on that thought she talked about how her and her band are “out there playing shows all the time, but not everybody can be at our shows, a lot more people can listen to this one track that we’ve made for them. Part of it also has to do with how people consume music these days,” adding that it’s also much easier on a band to release one or two songs at a time. “An album, a whole record, is like a record of time, it’s a larger piece, that you really have to be ready for as an individual artist, and as a band.

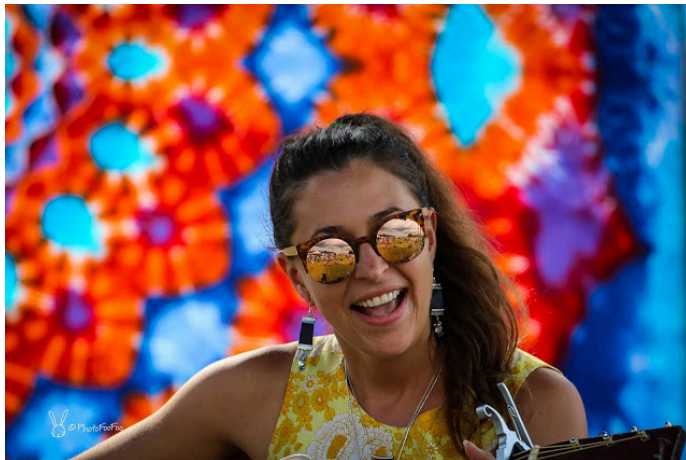
As we talked about it, it didn’t feel like the vibe was ‘Let’s make a new record.’ It felt like the vibe was like ‘Let’s just record some music’ and ‘Maybe we can release some music,’ but I don’t think it was time to make a



whole record right now.” Even jokingly referring to the fact that they should probably pay off her *Southland* album before they take on the task of releasing another one. This is a trend that Lindsay Lou seems to plan on continuing. “We’ve got the two songs this month and we’re going to release another couple in June, and I’ve got even more already in the can that are also ready to be released.”

She did hint at a future full-length album she was hoping to record soon with a side project she works with called The Sweet Water Warblers. The Sweet Water Warblers consist of Lindsay Lou, guitarist May Erlewine, and fiddler Rachel Davis. I asked her about the current prominence of women musicians in the live music scene. “We as women aren’t taking over, there’s still way more dudes, but we’re finally being given some space, and that is a very majestic thing that’s happening in our community right now. We are being given the space, so that our own voices can be heard, not through the translation of a man, but from within ourselves. I think it’s a really beautiful thing.”

I mentioned how that was a welcomed contrast to how women seem to be being held down in our day to day society. “You say ‘women are being held down,’ but I think that’s only part of it, I am a goddess and you are a god, and we all have our personal powers. That power is way stronger than any of us realize, just as much as you say ‘women are being held back’ I also think that we also hold ourselves back, but we’re all on the same team now. As women we are saying ‘hey let’s stop holding ourselves back’ and dudes are saying ‘hey ladies don’t hold yourselves back, teach me what I am doing that’s holding you back. How can I be on your team so that you have your space to be heard in all your goddess beauty? What do you have to contribute from your own self?’ Because the more that the balance is set right, so that women are heard as much as men, everyone is going to be better for it.”



Given our surroundings at the time of our conversation I would have been remiss if I didn’t ask her about the Michigan connection. Not only was her musical partner Josh Rilko jamming his heart out on stage, but so was Greg Burns, who has a fairly prominent day job, with another Michigan-based band as the front of house engineer for Greensky Bluegrass.

In addition, hours later Lindsay would find herself on stage as a guest vocalist with another fellow Michigander, Billy Strings and his Psychedelic Circus, adding vocals on a trio of songs during their marathon late night set. Lindsay joined the Psychedelic Circus for “Right Place, Wrong Time,”

“That’s What Love Will Make You Do” and a version of Led Zeppelin’s “Good Times, Bad Times” that was not only the highlight of the set, but showcased Lindsay’s vocals in such a manner that Robert Plant himself would’ve been in awe. So what is it about Michigan anyway? “This is something I’ve actually thought a lot about” said Lindsay. “Part of it is that we sort of have an island mentality up there. You don’t pass through Michigan to get to someplace else. If you’re there, you’re there intentionally. Those of us that were there, or are there, are all a part of this club and we’re all in it together, we’re all there for the same reason.”

As she heard her cue from stage to start getting ready for yet another sit in, this time adding her celestial vocals to Terrapin Mountain’s version of “The Great Pretender,” I asked her one more question. I asked her, if it were up to her, what would she like to read in an article about her and her music. “I just want to hear what you have to say, about what I’m doing and what’s going on, and if you want to use some of my words and quote me that’s great, but that’s not what I’m looking forward to when I read an article. I just want to know what does this person think about what’s going on.”

Well what I think is going on is that Lindsay Lou is growing exponentially as an artist. I think Lindsay Lou and her band have built a solid foundation on which they will hopefully expand upon for many years to come. I think Lindsay Lou and her band have captured a lot of people’s attention, and I for one can’t wait to see what they have

to show us in the future. If you too want to hear what's going on, I urge you to check out her two brand new tunes. If you like them, keep your ears peeled for the next pair of new tunes that are set to be released on June 7. If those songs capture your attention and, like me, you fall in love with her sound, do your best to check her band out when they come to your town. Lindsay Lou's extended musical family always has room for one more member.

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