

KATHY MATTEA

Home | [News](#) | Tour | Music | Videos | Coal | Links | Speaking/Teaching | Fan Club | Store



News

KATHY MATTEA - CALLING ME HOME



Daring folk-trad follow-up to Mattea's Coal features contributions from Stuart Duncan, Bryan Sutton, Tim and Mollie O'Brien and more . . .

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Reviews

[Concert Review - Kathy Mattea at Silver Center For The Arts in Plymouth, NH](#)

[My Kind Of Country](#)

by Jonathan Pappalardo on March 21, 2013

Kathy Mattea came ready to give it her all. Amidst a blinding snowstorm, and the after effects of the head cold that had eluded her to three days prior, she took the stage Feb 23 in the teeny 665 seat Hanaway Theatre (located in isolated Plymouth, NH) with just three other musicians, a caravan of guitars, and a message.

Of late Mattea has been outspoken on the subject of coal, or "Black Gold" as she sings in a

Nashville, TN - June 27th, 2012 - Most artists take fewer and fewer risks as they get older, but Kathy Mattea is a striking exception. She didn't play it safe while she charted mainstream country hits—16 of them reaching the top ten—and she's not about to start now.

Four years ago, Mattea, one of the most sure-footed country-pop song interpreters of her generation, caught everyone off guard with an album of old-timey Appalachian mining songs called *Coal*. She's delved even deeper into her Appalachian heritage with *Calling Me Home*, available from Sugar Hill on September 11th, 2012, co-produced with modern acoustic mastermind Gary Paczosa and featuring liner notes from bestselling author, and Kentucky-born kindred spirit, Barbara Kingsolver.

Mattea's new direction couldn't have taken her further from her old way of doing things. Where once she was pitched songs by Music Row

recent song. Her crusade opened a so-far two-album floodgate, a life-changing detour into the Appalachian Folk songs of her West Virginian heritage and the most fully realized music of her thirty-year recording career. Her otherworldly alto graces the lyrics of Jean Ritchie, Laurie Lewis, Hazel Dickens, and Alice Garrard with the plainspoken beauty of a woman directly in line with her authentic center.

But even more impressive is Mattea's ability to blend the "new" with the old, creating a woven tapestry linked by environmental cause, a deep sense of history, and a sharp ear. She opened with the first track on *Calling Me Home* ("A Far Cry") before launching into "Lonesome Standard Time," her #11 peaking single from 1992, without skipping a beat. She then graced the audience with my favorite of her singles, "Standing Knee Deep In A River (Dying of Thrust)," which was recently reinstated back into her set.

writers, now she collects the generations-old and new but old-in-soul tunes that move her at folk gatherings, and rounds out her repertoire through extensive research. Two songs here came from a CD that Alice Gerrard, of the influential '70s folk duo Hazel & Alice, personally pressed into her hand at one such festival.

Once Mattea found her songs, there was still the matter of wrapping her voice around them. A mountain modal folk ballad may sound like the simplest thing on earth, but that doesn't mean it's easy to sing. Says Kathy, "My big fear when I made Coal was I didn't grow up singing this stuff from when I was young. I've had a commercial music career for decades now. Am I gonna sound like a lounge singer trying to sing Appalachian songs?"

Thankfully, that fear didn't stop her from taking the leap, and both Coal and Calling Me Home offer decisive proof that she's no dilettante.

The intermingling of her past hits and newer material took me by surprise. I expected Mattea to focus mainly on the subject of coal, with a dusting of her biggest hits, thus leaving non-signature tunes as distant memories. But instead Mattea covered the hallowed ground between her past and present with the seamless ease of a songstress in tune with every note, paying close attention to every lyric.

Dressed in a mint green blouse, black jacket, and casual leggings, Mattea had the confidence of a seasoned professional but the cool of an everywoman; she was one among equals not a star singing to a crowd. Her greatest virtue was her subtlety, showcased through her candor and humor, on par with that of a next-door neighbor, a friend.

She greeted us like we've known her all our lives, commending us "Plymouthians" on our toughness in weather, braving a major snowstorm like a bright sunny day. Later she

She's always had a profound respect for traditional folk music—her ancestors played it, and in college she even took clawhammer banjo lessons and formed a bluegrass band—but she only recently came to accept that the music is in her blood. “I had to sing ‘Black Lung’ with Hazel Dickens in the fourth row,” she says, referring to the classic song and the revered Appalachian woman who wrote and sang it, about the tragic death of her brother. “Now that will grow you up. Either you own your performance of the song, or you don’t.”

Even during her radio-ruling days in the late ‘80s and early ‘90s, Kathy was proud of representing the people and place she hailed from on the global stage, but it was only after she’d been away from Cross Lanes, West Virginia for some three decades that she felt called to fully immerse herself in musical appreciation of her roots. That she sings from the perspective of an Appalachian whose career took her elsewhere is

encouraged communal participation, denouncing those who belittled us for an inability to carry a tune, before having us sing loud and proud on multiple choruses of both “Eighteen Wheels and a Dozen Roses” and “Come From The Heart.”

The latter bonded us as a tight-knit family - she enthusiastically attempted to get us clapping on the offbeat, which wasn’t meant to be. Clapping on all beats didn’t work either so plan B had us singing “You gotta sing like you don’t need the money, love like you’ll never get hurt, dance like nobody’s watching, it’s gotta come from the heart if you want it to work” at the tops of our lungs.

Further audience participation caused an off-script deviation into “Mary, Did You Know” and a proclamation that it wasn’t included with the \$35 ticket price. She rolled with the flow, only grappling with the tune to see if she could reach the high note without her head popping off (she did have a head cold, after all). The song

part of what makes Calling Me Home feel as contemporary as it does traditional. The top-notch cast of players doesn't hurt either. The contributions of the multi-talented Stuart Duncan and Bryan Sutton, along with bassist Byron House, percussionist Jim Brock, harmonizing siblings and fellow native West Virginians Tim and Mollie O'Brien and Mattea's longtime guitarist Bill Cooley, make for a crisp, vivid new-timey string band palette.

There just isn't a template for a career like Kathy Mattea's. Her mainstream accomplishments have already earned her a place in the West Virginia Music Hall of Fame, and, never one to tread water creatively, she's made her gracefully daring leap into the roots-honoring trad folk world. "To be a complete novice at something after you've been singing for three or four decades, to feel that humility of 'I don't even know if I'm going to be able to pull this off again,' it's a great gift," she shares. "A lot of

soared, and proved that sick or healthy professionalism wins out every time.

My favorite moment of the night confirmed another of Mattea's many facets - her shrewd intellect. Her successful blending of old and new cumulated in a shared linkage - most of Mattea's songs are deeply rooted in various fossil flues, albeit generally indirectly. I'd never viewed her material from such a focal point before, and she gracefully clarified her hypothesis, explaining how she's singing about the diesel fuel of trains ("Lonesome Standard Time") and the long hall truckers ("Eighteen Wheels") to the coal. This led to a fabulous rendition of "455 Rocket" (fossil fuel: gasoline), her 1997 single and final top 20 chart hit. (In another showcase of her clever humor, I loved how she modified the line, "as we skid I thought I heard angles sing (sounded like the Beach Boys)" into a sly commentary on Beyoncé's recent lip-synching scandal).

times people go through their whole lives and never get to that place.”

And it’s a very good place for Mattea to be. “I feel like I just made the album of my life; I articulated something I was put here to say. It’s my childhood and life experience of a sense of place and culture and history and family, and of all the music that I’ve learned and all I’ve learned performing all rolled into one thing.

For more music videos, check out ["Hello, My Name is Coal"](#) and ["Calling Me Home"](#).

Americana Gazette Feb/March 2013

Kathy Mattea - The Call of Home



Kathy Mattea is sitting quietly at her kitchen table in Nashville,

Mattea went on to grace us with more stories - how she first played the banjo in college only to pick it up again more recently, and the time she performed in newly restored theatre in Ohio, only to find out the majority of the audience didn’t know whom she was. She was candid on the subject of marriage, mentioning her and Jon’s recent (the prior week) 25-year milestone, gracing us with “Love Chooses You,” a Willow In The Wind album cut, and the song sung at their wedding.

Before “Love At The Five and Dime” she remarked on Nanci Griffith’s writing, likening the second verse to poetry, and shared that her classic “Where’ve You Been” almost wasn’t written, if co-writer Don Henry hadn’t been in the room. The latter came with a tale about a man with Alzheimer’s who’d forgotten his wife, until a visit in which she and their daughter were yelling at each other - and memories came flooding back.



reflecting on the recent change in her career.

She remembers the precise and painful

moment when she knew she would take this unexpected dive, this shift in focus from commercial country music to the sweet and sorrowful sounds of Appalachia. Actually, some of us would argue, the change may not be quite as dramatic as it first appears to be on the surface. But with her last two albums, the Grammy-nominated “Coal,” released in 2008, and the even more personal “Calling Me Home,” released last year, Mattea’s music is now fully tied to the “reluctant activism” that has tugged at her heart for nearly twenty years...

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Kathy Mattea gets back to her folkie roots

[Chicago Tribune](#)

By Chrissie Dickinson, Special to the Tribune

Some of my favorite moments weren’t even the older hits (she also sang “Untold Stories,” another unexpected surprise) but the new material, even more simplistic on stage, than record. The quiet beauty of “Agate Hill” elicited tears, while her effective reading of “West Virginia Mine Disaster” showcased her storytelling prowess. “The L&N Don’t Stop Here Anymore” was a nice uptempo change of pace, and “Coal Tattoo” really let the band rip.

My other great joy, and the benefits of my front row center seat, was witnessing the nuances of the band in action all evening. Sitting that close, I was able to take in all that was happening on stage and watch the four musicians bring each song to life with the fullness of a full ensemble. The front row seat brought an appreciation to the evening that even two or three rows back would’ve made near impossible.

Kathy Mattea's evolution from country hit-maker to respected trad-folkie isn't a reinvention. It's a return home.

Mattea, 53, first made her name in mainstream country in the late 1980s and early '90s with a string of hits, including "Eighteen Wheels and a Dozen Roses" and "Where've You Been." In 2008 the singer pulled a 180-degree turn with the release of "Coal."

The spare and haunting collection of acoustic songs that harked back to her Appalachian roots snagged Mattea a Grammy nomination in the traditional folk category.

Mattea follows up that triumph with the recently released "Calling Me Home" (Sugar Hill), a rich acoustic collection built on mandolin, fiddle, banjo, Dobro, zither, percussion and guitar. Mattea

Seeing Mattea live was one of those musical highlights of life where everything comes together perfectly for a truly outstanding evening. She's an otherworldly talent who has only aged with sincere grace and humility since her Nashville hit making days. If you've never attending one of her shows, or if it's been a while since your last evening with Mattea, it's well worth it to catch her when she's in your area. It'll likely be one of the best musical nights of your life. That was certainty the case for me.

Concert Review

[Bluegrass Today](#)

A Tribute to Hazel Dickens - - September 26, 2012

By David Morris

"Among my favorite moments: Kathy Mattea's hauntingly beautiful a cappella performance of Black Lung... [read full review](#)

performs Friday at the Old Town School of Folk Music.

Like its predecessor, the aptly titled "Calling Me Home" continues her exploration of the mountain country from which she came. It's a personal journey that began four years ago with "Coal."

"In a lot of ways, 'Coal' was a career record for me," she says. "It woke something up for me. People that you wouldn't even think would be concerned with the story of coal really connected with it, both musically and to the human side of the story. It also connected me with my own family story. It knitted together a bigger picture and changed the way I see my own life." Mattea assembled a rootsy all-star cast for the making of "Calling Me Home."

Gary Paczosa, who has worked with Alison Krauss and Dolly Parton, is on board as co-producer.

Black Lung ... [Read full review](#)

Review

[Country Universe](#)

by Ben Foster

September 20, 2012

The album does everything that music in its finest and purest form is meant to do. The resulting product is not only the best country album of 2012, but a new peak for a woman who has already made some of the most compelling music of her generation. Without a doubt, Mattea's *Calling Me Home* is a must-have ...

[Read full review](#)

Kathy Mattea: Calling Me Home

[PopMatters](#)

By Brice Ezell 14 September 2012

The September 11th release of *Calling Me Home*, Kathy Mattea's fourteenth studio LP, is fitting given the subject material. The plight of the

The musicians include the sterling bluegrass multi-instrumentalist Stuart Duncan. Emmylou Harris, Patty Loveless, Krauss and Tim and Mollie O'Brien contribute background vocals.

"Calling Me Home" includes liner notes courtesy of best-selling novelist and Kentucky native Barbara Kingsolver. Mattea first met the author this year at an event to discuss mountain top removal.

"It's a very extreme form of strip mining all over Appalachia," Mattea says. "Barbara and I were doing what we could to let people know what the results of this mining are, which are really tough for the people who live there and for the environment."

Mattea was just putting the finishing touches on "Calling Me Home" and had an inspiration.

"It just seemed like a no-brainer to ask her to

coal miner has been around for a considerable amount of time in the history of the United States, but when "the world stopped turning on that September day", the state of things for blue-collar workers changed significantly. 9/11 may not have changed everything, but as a moment in American history it's undeniably pivotal ... [read full review](#)

Kathy Mattea Strips Away Old Habits on 'Calling Me Home'

[Billboard](#)

"It was a little bit like being naked" Kathy Mattea's last album, 2008's "Coal," topped the Bluegrass Albums chart and earned her a Grammy nomination.

Kathy Mattea's last album, 2008's "Coal," topped the Bluegrass Albums chart and earned her a Grammy nomination. Her newest Sugar Hill release, "Calling Me Home," is very much in the same vein musically as its' predecessor, but the

write the liner notes," says Mattea. "I really felt the kindred thing with her because of a lot of what she writes about Appalachia echoes my own experience and my own feelings."

Mattea grew up in Cross Lanes, W. Va. "Ten minutes up the river was downtown Charleston," she says. "Ten minutes down the river was the little coal town my mom grew up in. So I grew up in both worlds."

On both "Coal" and "Calling Me Home," Mattea covers songs by two Appalachian music legends: Hazel Dickens, who passed away last year at 75, and Jean Ritchie, now 89. Mattea got to know both women.

"They're both fierce in their own way," says Mattea. "I love that about both of them. That's part of what's so beautiful about that culture -

singer tells Billboard that she feels she took things a step further with the new collection ...

[read full review](#)

West Virginia girl Mattea celebrates Appalachian roots

[Charleston Gazette](#)

Since her chart-topping run in the '80s when she was one of country music's most celebrated and awarded singers, Kathy Mattea has looked more and more inward, a road that always leads her back to West Virginia. She admittedly discovered the depth of ... [read full review](#)

Music Review: On 'Calling Me Home,' Kathy Mattea sings eloquently ...

[Washington Post](#)

Kathy Mattea, "Calling Me Home" (Sugar Hill)
The album opens with a forlorn fiddle, feverish and fidgety until it finally settles on a D. With

what you see is what you get."

Meeting Dickens and Ritchie inspired Mattea to double down on forging her own singular path. "Hazel and Jean never deviated from who they were," she says. "They didn't second-guess anything. There's just a real purity to both of them. I walked away with inspiration that I wanted to be as pure in my Kathy-ness as Hazel was in her Hazel-ness and Jean is in being Jean Ritchie. I want to know myself and my own direction and my own depth as an artist and a person in the same way."

On "Coal," Mattea covered the dark classic "Black Lung," a stark lament Dickens wrote about the coal miner's lung disease that killed her brother.

After the release of "Coal," Mattea found herself on stage singing "Black Lung" with Dickens in attendance. No pressure there.

that, the tone is set.

Bluegrass rarely gets more bluesy than on "Calling Me Home." This is mountain music, sorrowful and restless and struggling to make sense of its surroundings and the way they've changed ... [read full review](#)

Folk songstress Kathy Mattea returns with a new record and a nostalgic approach to her roots

[Nashville Scene](#)

Calling Her Home

by Jon Weisberger

"I'm from West 'by-God' Virginia," says the opening line of Larry Cordle and Jenee Fleenor's brilliant first-person narrative, "Hello, My Name Is Coal," and when Kathy Mattea sings it, as she does on *Calling Me Home*, her brand-new release on Sugar Hill Records, it's the simple truth. The song is one of several that revolve around coal and the people who work in it, but while the album represents an extension of *Coal*, the

"Oh lord, that was a moment that'll grow you up, having to sing 'Black Lung' with Hazel Dickens in the first row," Mattea says. "That was the moment when

I thought, 'Well Kathy, you either own your performance with this song or you don't, and now is when you find out.' Hazel came up and said, 'You know, I really enjoyed that. I'm always singing that song, I never get to just sit and listen to the story.'"

Several songs on the new release return Mattea to the complicated subject of coal as both an environmental issue and a livelihood for miners.

The

Celtic-tinged "West Virginia Mine Disaster" is a tragic story-song written by Ritchie. Mattea wraps her rich alto around the conflicted lyrics of "Hello, My Name is Coal." "Some say I'm a savior / Some say death is what I bring / I've broke miners' backs and hearts / and I've wrestled for their souls."

album represents an extension of Coal, the Grammy-nominated, Marty Stuart-produced project that preceded it, the title of this one's a tip-off that it deals with a broader range of subjects ... [read full review](#)

"As far as the emotional impact for me, there's a lot of beauty in these songs and a lot of heart," she says. "I was looking for songs that made me feel a certain fullness. I was looking for a different kind of beauty. Even songs about loss can be that.

Sometimes there has to be a death before there can be a resurrection."

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