

CLAUDIA NYGAARD BIO

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CLAUDIA NYGAARD is a mesmerizing storyteller and cinematic lyricist, whose work reveals a daredevil's vulnerability and a complete lack of self-censorship. On her latest album **Lucky Girl** she tackles unwanted pregnancy, dysfunctional relationships, statutory rape, alcoholism, and betrayal. But there are also songs in this collection that are heartfelt, humorous, scrappy, and sensual; and all thirteen of these little slices of Americana are delivered with a lush amber honey voice that is powerful, resonant, and deeply emotional.

Claudia's writing has won her numerous awards; and radio chart success. The awards began in Los Angeles during the early years of her career, and they propelled her move to Nashville. In Music City she landed a job as a **staff songwriter for Greenwood Music Publishing on Nashville's Music Row**. The position gave her the chance to polish her craft, and she went on to win both the prestigious **Kerrville Folk Festival Songwriting Competition**; and, with the title cut from her latest album **Lucky Girl**, the **Tumbleweed Music Festival Songwriting Competition**. The song rose to **#3 on the Folk Alliance Radio song chart** and the album to #5. It also received generous airplay on the Americana and roots music charts. The press raved about the recording, the songwriting, and her vocals, and Making A Scene magazine included **Lucky Girl** in their **Top Albums of the Year list**, as did several radio stations.

In October of 2023 Claudia added playwright to her list of accomplishments, with the **premiere of her children's musical "Little Red Riding Hood" by the Academy of Performing Arts in Massachusetts**. The work is part of a series she is creating called "Time Tested Tales Told in Tunes".

Nygaard's previous album **Let The Storm Roll In** achieved similar success grabbing **#1 on the Cashbox Roots/Country Chart**; and **five stars from Maverick magazine**. Legendary folk music magazine *Sing Out* praised her voice and said her songs "*rival the likes of Guy Clark or Ian Tyson*". Her freshman effort **Somewhere Else To Go**, released on the UK recording label Round Tower, charted in **the top five on the European Americana charts**. It was also one of **the top twelve records of the year** in 2001 for the UK magazine *Country Music Roundup*.

Claudia is a quick witted and charismatic performer, with a twinkle in her eye that convinces everyone in her audience that she is sharing a secret with them alone. And her storytelling doesn't end when the song does. Sharing both the inspiration behind the tunes, and also frequently creating outlandish, irreverent, and humorous monologues, her patter is as important a part of her performances as the songs themselves. A veteran road warrior, she has performed at over 250 fairs and festivals in forty-eight of the United States and ten foreign countries.

BEGINNINGS...

Claudia's music has its roots in the adobe clay of the San Joaquin Valley in California. Her father was in the construction business and worked weekdays in the San Francisco Bay Area, but he and her uncle ran a ranch about two hours east of there in the San Joaquin, where they spent every weekend working their small herd of Hereford cattle. Saturday mornings Claudia would awaken to her Uncle Reed sitting on the edge of her bed singing some old Hank Williams song, and a short while later they'd all pile into the pick-up: Claudia, her dad, uncle, the dog, and sometimes a hired hand named J.C. They'd make the two-hour trip to the ranch listening to KEEN radio out of San Jose until they lost the signal, and then they'd pick up KRAK radio once they got over Altamont Pass. Half way to the ranch they'd stop for a soda pop. Claudia got a cream soda, and the men got "sodas" in little paper bags that just barely covered the cans. After a while they'd start singing 'The Strawberry Roan', which had about as many verses as there were miles to drive, and they'd have a great time arguing about how the song actually went. Not tall enough to see over the dashboard, Claudia spent two hours eye-to-eye with that old truck radio every Saturday morning, and fell asleep staring down the little yellow light in that radio on the way home Sunday night. She was being brainwashed. Growing up she spent five days a week in the suburbs being carted off to dancing school and other activities by her mother, but what she remembers about her childhood is the hot, dusty, smell of baked adobe, the morning smell of the dew on the alfalfa, the bright shine of the sun off the irrigation pipe, and the coolness of the water in the summertime when she slid into the irrigation ditches fed by the Delta Mendota Canal.

Her teenage years found her singing in school choirs and with the high school dance band, performing in musicals, writing poetry, and learning to play the guitar. Performing with the guitar she won "**Miss Santa Clara**" just out of high school, which led to some modeling jobs and a job as the **weather reporter for KNTV Channel 11**, a job that helped her put herself through college. After graduating from **San Jose State University with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Theater** she worked another year at KNTV until she was part of a layoff that left her unemployed. She had been sitting in with a band in a local club after the 11 o'clock news on Friday nights, and was meeting some musicians in the area that included a singer/songwriter named Chuck McCabe. They fell in love. McCabe had a job for the summer singing on Cape Cod in Massachusetts at a bar called "the Woodshed", and suggested Nygaard come with him. Thinking it would be a fun thing to sing for the summer before getting another "real" job, she followed him east. She never had a "real" job again.

When her relationship with McCabe fell apart three years later, Claudia moved to Los Angeles where she won a singing contest at the famous country music emporium "**The Palomino**". She had her first standing ovation there, and became a regular performer, headlining many times. She and her band became well known in the Southern California area, winning honors two years in a row as one of the hottest bands in town in the Music Connection Magazine "**Pick of the Players Poll**". After years of singing in bars where her main job was to sell booze and impersonate a jukebox, appearing at the Palomino and doing a "show" allowed Claudia to discover that she was more than just a singer, she was a storyteller. The years in front of the camera at KNTV, chatting with a million people every night, had given her an ease in front of crowds that few acts had. With her charming stage patter she was a natural for fairs, and began touring up and down the state playing one fair after another.

During this time her passion for songwriting became foremost in her life and she began winning awards for it. Chosen a "**best new writer**" from the **Los Angeles Songwriter's Showcase**, and for both her singing and songwriting from the **Music City Song Festival**, she gained the courage to take her songs to Hollywood music publishers. They were very encouraging, but they all said the same thing... "you belong in Nashville". So she moved to Nashville. Claudia sold everything that wouldn't fit in the back of a 5x8 U-Haul trailer and headed east. She spent the first year she was there, 2,000 miles away from everyone she knew and loved, curled up the fetal position by day while she worked the graveyard shift in a convenience store by night. Finally she uncoiled enough to risk playing her songs for some music publishers, and encouraged by their response she went after

(and landed) **a job as a staff songwriter for Greenwood Music**, owned by "God Bless the USA" country singer/songwriter Lee Greenwood. When major personnel changes occurred at Greenwood Music, including the departure of the manager who signed her to the company, Claudia elected to leave and bought back her entire catalog. Currently her own company "Cattlelog Music" holds the copyrights to all her songs. Nygaard performed several showcases in Nashville during this period, and began to develop a "buzz". Executives from **Capitol Records** became interested in her as an artist, and once again she felt she was finally gaining ground until a new CEO took over Capitol and decided that rather than sign new artists they needed to slash their roster.

The slash between singer and songwriter is pretty small when describing Claudia, and while she intended to get another staff songwriting job on the row, the rush of singing to a live audience and her love of the road had the greater pull. She couldn't resist it, and tore up the highways of North America performing for audiences at **over 250 county and state fairs from Alaska to New Hampshire**, and from North Dakota to Florida. She headlined at smaller fairs, and was the opening act at larger ones, sharing the stage with such stars as the late Glen Campbell, The Marshall Tucker Band, Marty Stuart, John Anderson, Tracy Lawrence, John Michael Montgomery, Shenandoah, Mel McDaniel, Riders in the Sky, Comedian Jerry Clower, The Forester Sisters, David Frizzell and Shelly West, Faron Young, Kitty Wells, Bobby Bare, Billy "Crash" Craddock, Jimmy Rodgers, Jim Stafford, The Drifters, and the Ventures. In the fall of 1989 she received **a standing ovation from 8,000** people when she opened the show for John Anderson at the South Mississippi Fair in Laurel, MS.

A couple years after leaving Greenwood Music, an invitation to attend "Midem" (an international music conference in Cannes, France) gave Claudia the opportunity to perform for a few UK record labels, and she was quickly **signed by Round Tower Music**. Round Tower released the CD **"Somewhere Else To Go"** on Claudia, which charted in the **top ten on the European Americana charts**. It was also one of **the top twelve records of the year in 2001** for the UK magazine Country Music Roundup. In December of that year, CMRU chose Claudia for the cover of the magazine.

Back in the states, Nygaard continued to perform at fairs and festivals, but encouraged by the response to her tunes that she had received in Europe, she was no longer slipping one or two of her own songs into her show, she was now playing mostly her own songs. Other singer/songwriters Claudia knew in Nashville were playing songwriter festivals, and Nygaard decided to enter one festival in particular that she heard wonderful things about. **The Kerrville Folk Festival** down in Texas. She won, and not only won the contest, but also a whole new way to make a living playing her own music. She now performs her own songs in concert halls across America, and at folk festivals like the **Falcon Ridge Folk Festival where she was chosen an emerging artist in 2009**.

2011 saw the release of **"Let The Storm Roll In"** which included the two winning songs from the Kerrville Folk Festival: "J.C." (about the earlier mentioned hired hand) and "Georgia Boy". It achieved amazing chart success including **#1 on the Cashbox Roots/Country Chart, and #8 on the Folk DJ Chart**, with every one of her self-penned compositions receiving airplay. It also received rave reviews, including **five stars from Americana Benchmark "Maverick Magazine"**, and Sing out Magazine claimed Nygaard's songs "rival the likes of Guy Clark and Ian Tyson". This was Claudia Nygaard's second attempt at production and she focused on choosing the instrumentation that best captured the emotion of the song - adding the exuberance of a tuba to the rollicking "Miss Kitty", and cello to capture the last moments shared by a daughter and her father on "His Left Side". The twelve self-penned songs in this collection were beautifully showcased through the talents of musicians that included Colin Linden of Blackie and the Rodeo Kings, Grammy winners Andy Reiss and Jeff Taylor of the Time Jumpers, multi-instrumentalist Fats Kaplan, Telecaster genius Redd Volkaert, ace dobro player Randy Khors, and frequent Prairie Home Companion lap steel favorite Cindy Cashdollar. The rhythm section was made up of Johnny Cash sideman Dave Roe on upright bass, and Rick Lonow on percussion. It also includes a passionate duet with Lennie Gallant, a winner of numerous awards including artist and album of the year from the Canadian East Coast Music Association.

In the fall of 2018 Claudia was honored to win the Tumbleweed Music Festival Songwriting competition with the title cut of her soon to be released new album "Lucky Girl". Thanks to her fans, who supported her successful crowdfunding campaign, she was able to record this album with Neilson Hubbard producing. Hubbard is currently nominated for a grammy for Folk album of the year, and was also nominated by the Americana Music Association in 2018 for his production on "Rifles and Rosary Beads" for artist Mary Gauthier. Nygaard's songwriting on this project is scrappy, sensual, vulnerable, and shockingly honest, and Hubbard's production has created the perfect soundtrack for the stories these songs tell. From the foot stomping upbeat title cut "Lucky Girl", to the powerfully delivered "in-your-face" confrontation on "Me Too", the tender intimacy and loss of "I Wonder", and the playful, sultry and languid "Tumblin Down", Claudia hollers, whispers, belts, and croons with a powerful and resonant amber honey voice. The success of this project is simply that the match of those tracks, with these songs, and that voice, could not have been better. Mastering the new album, Jim Demain of Yes Mastering remarked "I work on a lot of recordings, but it is rare that I hear vocals sung with so much emotion without being melodramatic."

A year or two ago Claudia ran into Americana artist of the year John Prine outside a movie theater in Nashville. He generously stopped for a short conversation and asked her how her career was going. "I'm not playing rooms the size you are, but I'm making a living singing my own songs!" she replied. "Well then", he said, "you are a big success aren't you?" "Yes" she replied. "I'm a very LUCKY GIRL".

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