

Amy Ray (Indigo Girls) will be coming through town with her top notch band to play songs from her acclaimed 2014 solo country release, *Goodnight Tender*. She will also include a select group of songs from her earlier solo releases.

For decades, Ray has performed with Emily Saliers in the Indigo Girls, and their ongoing success derives, in part, from intricate, ethereal harmonies, from the interplay of their distinct voices and sensibilities. Ray also has turned up the volume in her solo career as an ax-slinging rocker, producing six albums with punk edges and defiant, powerhouse vocals. In both capacities, she integrates the personal with the political, the dynamics of relationships with principles of progressive social justice.

Ray's 2014 release, *Goodnight Tender* marks a dramatic departure from those formats and themes, though her vocals, even when snarled at high decibels, always convey a rending ache that serves folk, punk, country, or any refrain tinged with pain. Ray convened artists she trusts with fiddle, banjo, dobro, pedal steel, guitar, mandolin, bass, and drums, and then arranged their microphone placement like an old-school sound engineer to create an authentic, vintage sound, gently imposing Strum And Twang on her Sturm Und Drang.

Legendary country songwriter, Harlan Howard famously summed up country music as “three chords and the truth,” and *Goodnight Tender* offers the kind of stripped-down melodies; honest, hat-in-hand emotions; and keening pedal steel and old-time strings that once emanated from tear-stained, honky-tonk jukeboxes. In her take on the early Nashville Sound, she sings movingly about dogs, pills, Duane Allman, and heartache.

“I love to scream and growl, but I also love the soft, sweet singing of artists like George Jones,” Ray says, “so I slowed the tempo, got into a lower register, and let the songs and the musicians around me dictate a different direction. I was tempted to slip a political song in here, but I wanted this album free of anything that defines identity in any way.”

What she strove for instead was the rush of pure feeling.

“I didn't want the laborious arrangement process – I wanted recordings I didn't have to mess with too much,” she says. “So these songs are more visceral than intellectual, with a strong, wistful sense of setting that enables you to sense the creek and the dirt as well as the unrequited love. I wanted a record that sounds good and feels right when you're driving down a rural road.”

Ray enjoys plenty of opportunities to road-test these songs on her secluded, wooded property in north Georgia, where banjos and bluegrass still echo throughout the mountains. “At some point, those sounds are bound to seep into your life,” she says.

In 2015, Ray released a live record, *The Tender Hour* from her days thus far, touring with her country outfit. She is working on a new batch of country songs to play live and to bring into the studio in the coming year.