

'Play your heart out

— *And hope that someone is out there listening*

BY SUE ZALOKAR
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Dubbed "Flannery O'Connor with a telecaster" by the online magazine Twang Nation, Lindsay Fuller is no longer the Northwest's little secret.

Now based in Seattle, Wash., Fuller came of age in Birmingham, Ala., and the South still resonates in her raw, warm and foreboding lyrics, aggrandized by her distinct vocal delivery and a voice that has been likened to Lucinda Williams and Nick Cave.

Fuller is coming off of a watershed year for an independent artist. She was part of the Dave Matthews Caravan this past summer, signed with a record label, and now she's touring with Amy Ray of the Indigo Girls and Jeff Fielder, promoting the release her third album, "You, Anniversary." The trio will be playing a CD release show for Fuller's album on March 27 at the Doug Fir on East Burnside in Portland. Amy Ray appears on the new album's title track and Fuller is featured on two tracks on Ray's eighth solo album, "Lung of Love," which was released Feb. 28.

"It's just been a bit of a whirlwind," says Fuller, who took time on a visit to Portland to talk about music, death and stories of the discomfited.

Sue Zalokar: *You live in Seattle now, but were born in the South — a region thick with a history of notable storytelling. Was there someone or some experience that brought out the storyteller in you?*

Lindsay Fuller: The South has a reputation for storytelling, but I'm sure there are good storytellers everywhere and I guess my family is a bunch of talkers — a bunch of loud mouths — so I just grew up hearing stories. We all have stories. That's kind of what makes it worth being around for — hearing other people's stories and feeling like you can connect with something.

S.Z.: *I can't think of two U.S. cultures further apart than Birmingham and Seattle. Has there ever been a conflict, personally or musically for you on that account?*

L.F.: There are all kinds of people everywhere. That's really what I've realized with all of this traveling and moving around that I've done. There are rednecks in every state, there are awesome people in every state, there are assholes in every state, and that's really all there is to it. There just happen to be a few more churches in Birmingham than there are in Seattle.

S.Z.: *You have gained attention for your mournful lyricism and your tales of death, but your songs are hopeful too. Tell me about the pervasive death theme in your writing and what it means to you.*

L.F.: Death is something that knocks us all back into what is most meaningful. There's nothing like somebody in your life dying to remind you why we're all here. It seems to be sort of a taboo subject, but — at the same time I understand not wanting to sit around and think about dying — but, how can you not help but think about death if you're really thinking about life? The two just go hand in hand.

S.Z.: *I read that you have said your mission in songwriting is "to comfort the disturbed and to disturb the comfortable."*

L.F.: Well, I stole that from David Foster Wallace who stole it from somebody else.

S.Z.: *Still, it's an intriguing thought.*

L.F.: My hope with a song is that I create some sort of a longing inside the person hearing it. Whether it's a longing to turn off my song or whether it's a longing to think about something. I just want some sort of reaction. I want my music to mean something and to stir emotions in people.

S.Z.: *This is your third album. Was the experience of recording "You, Anniversary" similar or distinct from your other recording experiences?*

L.F.: They've all been totally unique. They've all been special to me. This one in particular was just as special and unique. All of the players I've made my records with have been great and they've done a great job. On "You, Anniversary" I was coming from a place of desperation for that sense of meaning so it was a very important record for me. I was gonna make that record. I didn't care what stood in my way. I just knew, clearer than any record that I've made, I just knew what it was I was after. And then, Paul Bryan, who produced the album, he locked onto a vision for the album and it just happened really quickly. Things just came together. It was kind of spooky how it all just fell into place. All the musicians, they just knew what to do with my songs. It's definitely the fastest record I've ever made.

S.Z.: *What is the story behind the title track?*

L.F.: It's based on a W.S. Merwin poem that I read when I was in college, "For the Anniversary of my Death." He's definitely one of my favorite poets. I revisited the poem before I wrote the song. The poem describes how we pass the anniversary of our death every year and we have no idea that. So I wrote a song. This could be my big day and I don't know it. We're here and

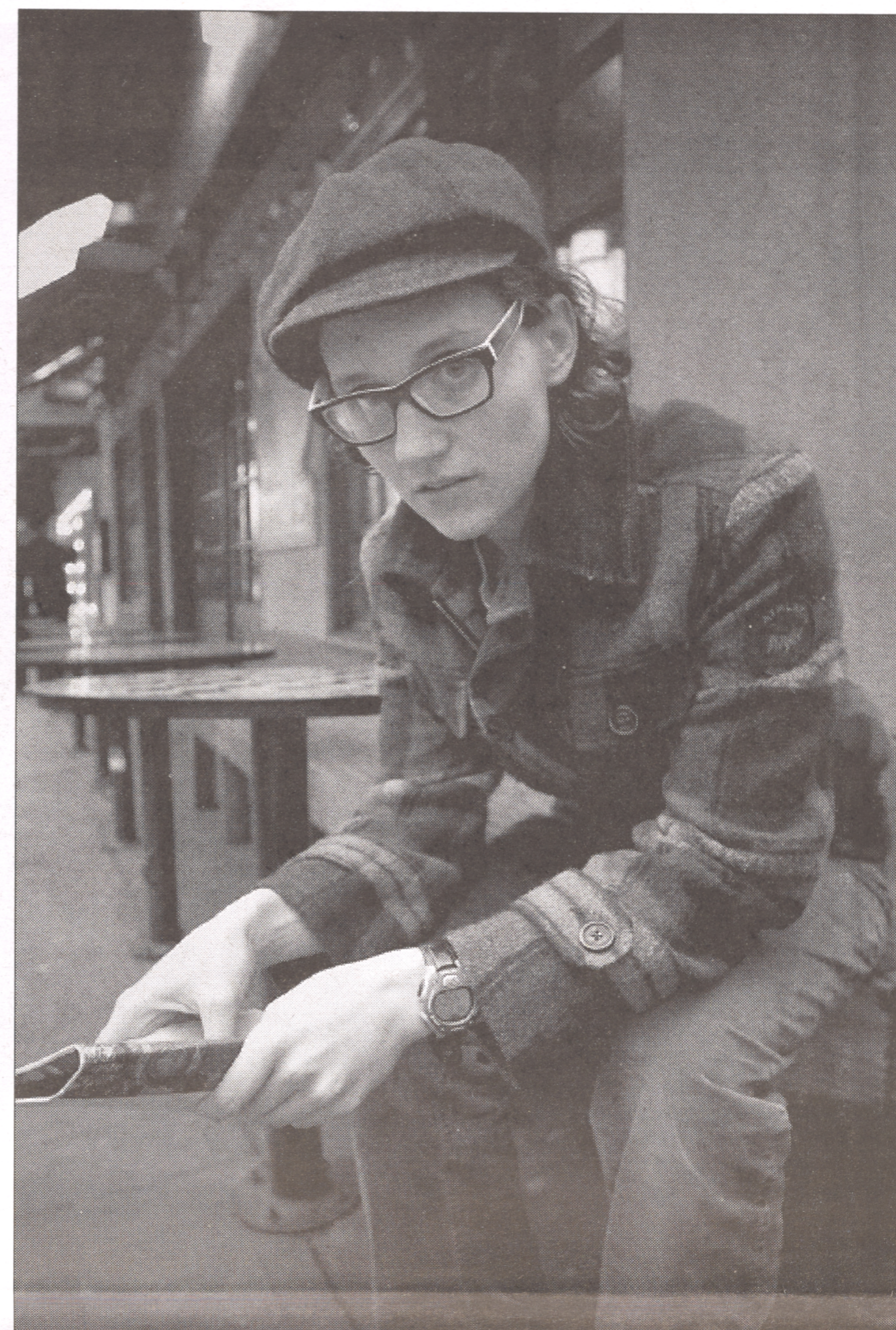


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then we're gone. That's it. We're here, all of us. We feel very much alive. We don't feel like we're going to die, but it's going to happen to all of us.

S.Z.: *You are currently touring with and have built a friendship with Amy Ray from the Indigo Girls, someone who greatly influenced you as a songwriter. What is it like to have the experience of playing with someone who once shaped your own style and drive and now is complementing your music?*

L.F.: I don't think I'm fully capable of contemplating how awesome it is to get to play with Amy Ray. It is truly awesome and she's definitely one of my heroes and pretty much inspired me to play when I was a kid. Hers was the voice that I would listen to. I would put on an Indigo Girls cassette and sing the whole song through, over and over. To meet one of your heroes and to find out that she's also just a wonderful person — not everybody gets to experience that, so I've been super fortunate to also be able to call her my friend.

S.Z.: *The music industry is daunting, to say the least.*

L.F.: Oh, god.

S.Z.: *Amy Ray is a strong woman, in a tough business that can be hard on independent musicians. She must be a wealth of experience in navigating the business. Spending time with her, you must be learning about more than music.*

L.F.: Well, she's taught me a lot about performing. She's taught me about making the best of stuff. And to be thankful for what you do get and not bitch about what you don't get. She's so generous. The fact that she's willing to help out other musicians that are trying to get their names out there, she's a person that has been always know to take people under her wing and help them. I'm indebted to her for sure, for taking me on tour. She's been great, plus I'm a huge fan of her music.

S.Z.: *Right now in your career you are playing in front of thousands of people on some nights and possibly a handful of people on other nights. What is that like?*

L.F.: It doesn't matter who's out there in the crowd, you just have to play your heart out and hope that somebody is out there listening. That can be hard though. It can be discouraging and you can feel like, why am I doing this? But honestly some of my favorite shows have been the shows that there's been poor attendance, but there's been a couple people in the crowd, I knew, just really loved it. And then there can be a big crowd, you don't get any kind of feedback. If you want to be in the music business, what I'm learning is that you have to stay positive, which isn't my strong suit. But you just have to or you'll go crazy, because there are a lot of ups and downs. One second you feel like you're on top of the world and the next second you're just incredibly discouraged. And you just have to be able to push through that and remember why you're doing it.

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