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## W.Va. native Kathy Mattea brings her tour home

By DAVE LAVENDER  
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Courtesy of the Marshall Artists Series Grammy-winning singer and West Virginia native Kathy Mattea will perform at 7:30 p.m. Friday, Dec. 12, at the Keith-Albee Performing Arts Center in Huntington. The first half of the concert will be her country hits while the second half will be Christmas songs.

The Herald-Dispatch

HUNTINGTON At Christmastime everyone thinks of home.

Being there, or returning there if they are gone.



To place a tree topper of sorts on its 2014 fall semester, which has included two other holiday shows, the Marshall Artists Series brings in one of the Mountain State's most revered artists two-time Grammy Award winner, and two-time Country Music Association Female Vocalist of the Year, Kathy Mattea.

Mattea, whose holiday concert tour takes her from Oklahoma and Texas to Michigan and Minnesota, swings the tour bus back home next week.

Mattea will perform Thursday, Dec. 11 at Carnegie Hall in Lewisburg, West Virginia, and then will be in concert at 7:30 p.m. Friday, Dec. 12 at the historic Keith-Albee Performing Arts Center in downtown Huntington as part of the 78th season of the Marshall Artists Series.

Tickets are \$66.67/\$45.80 for the Artists Series concert.

Mattea, who won a Grammy Award for her 1993 Christmas album, "Good News," and who chalked up another stellar Christmas album, "Joy For Christmas," will be performing a split concert during which the first half is packed with her classic hits like the No. 1, "Eighteen Wheels and a Dozen Roses," while the second half celebrates the spiritual side of Christmas.

Earlier this week, and just before she set out for her first December weekend dates, we touched base with Mattea, who is excited to be bringing her holiday concert tour home.

Lavender: Michael Lipton just announced the 2015 inductees yesterday for the 10th anniversary of the West Virginia Music Hall of Fame. For you, as a performer and a West Virginian, how cool has it been to be able to consistently come back home and make such a strong and real musical connection thanks to Mountain Stage and the West Virginia Music Hall of Fame?



Mattea: "Those Hall of Fame nights have been like no others, like I walk out of there and I feel like my heart won't fit in my chest it has swollen up so much from sheer inspiration. I think about all of those young people who are drawn to music like I was, and I had nothing like that to tell me it was possible and that I could do this. I wonder how many lives are changed by their efforts."

"I think Michael (Lipton) has this combination of curiosity and reverence for the music, and I have learned this in recent years about Appalachian culture is that when you are in it sometimes you can't see it, he is inside it and is reflecting it back to itself and that is really valuable."

Lavender: I'm really stoked you're coming back home to West Virginia for Christmas in particular because as far as songs about the "true meaning of Christmas," go I really count "Mary, Did you Know?" from your first Christmas album as one of the greatest. Tell us about finding that song, which now everyone and their cousin has cut?

Mattea: "What a gift. I was looking for songs and it took me about five years to gather enough Christmas songs to be ready to go. I took a long time, and I got to keep my standards really high. I was talking to a girlfriend of mine. We had lunch and she said what are you working on and I told her and she said well if I was in your position I would do this song, ' Mary did you Know?' She started reciting the lyrics to me and all of the hair on the back of my neck stood up. This was pre-Internet so I spent the rest of the afternoon on the phone trying to find this song and when I did it was amazing because it turned out that it was written by a friend of mine Buddy Greene, who wrote the music for Mark Lowery. I didn't know Mark at the time, but he got to tell me the story. He is a Christian comedian and so this was not his wheelhouse, but he was writing one day and he said the whole thing just came down in one fell swoop and he knew what he had. He called a friend and said can you write a melody and the friend sent back a worktape and Mark called him back and said that is not the melody to this song. He sent it to second person and the same thing, nope, that is not the



melody. He sent it Buddy who was the third person, and thank God he held out, it is perfect. I want to say one of the things I love is that it works even from a secular place. If you are not a Christian person you can understand the swelling of the heart when a person is born and what is going to change due to the rhythm and mystery of the generation of life."

Lavender: No matter what age you are Christmas is that time where our hearts and minds are transported back to our childhoods. What are some of the special Christmas memories you have, and are there any special holiday traditions, that you carry on?

Mattea: I grew up in a big family and for my entire life my family would have a party on Christmas Eve, at my house, we would host and the house was so crowded with all of your aunts and uncles and all the kids, and then you would wake up the next morning and it was Christmas and it was all in your house, it was so incredible. It was incredible growing up and a lot of my cousins growing up were like the sisters I never had and they are so now. Of course now the family is scattered and my parents' generation is dying off. I have no kids so my husband and I have started a very quiet tradition on Christmas Eve. There is a little art theater in our neighborhood, we go to dinner and walk to the theater and watch "It's a Wonderful Life" with a lot of people and everyone is sobbing and we run into friends that we know. People are now starting to join us and it is now a gaggle of people and Christmas Day is gathering with friends but this little Christmas Eve tradition is really special with us since our parents have passed."

Lavender: As an artist and a spiritual person, how do you retain the great spirit of the holidays as we revolve in an American consumer culture that pushes everything forward and faster until we have shopping on Thanksgiving.



Mattea: I think as the culture becomes more and more spinning that it is our responsibility to push back from that and to create a space in my own life, and in order to say yes to what is important in my life I have to say no to some of the things that are becoming culturally entrenched, so that might be deciding not to do a big shop, or for instance, a bunch of my girlfriends are planning an afternoon of just food and hanging out but I will arrive home on the bus at 3 a.m., and I will like have done four shows in a row. But I'm like Kathy you have to do this, because gathering and looking at each other's faces is what it is all about. It takes a lot of effort to remember that. I do speak to this in my show that there are things that get turned into a cultural kind of plastic icon and there is a kind of concept of we are all together and we are all happy and I want to make room for everything. I feel grief at Christmas because I miss my family and I miss my parents and I want to make room to feel all of it. This whole season is about death and rebirth and the mystery, and there is a reason that Christmas gets celebrated in the darkest time of the year because here is this baby that is going to change the world, and we know there is hope and we know things keep moving forward and there is a light in the world even if we can't see it yet."

Lavender: You've always been such a great champion of speaking your mind for social justice from your work with HIV/AIDS-related charities and playing at VH1's v Save The Music concert to your work in the past few years speaking out against mountaintop removal.

I really think you walk the brave line of our ancestors, Mother Jones, and songwriters like Hazel Dickens, and I count "Calling Me Home," as maybe your greatest album ... as a West Virginia native what it is your Christmas wish for your home, and the future of the Mountain State?

Mattea: (Long pause and she starts to cry) I get teary thinking about that question. I want more than anything for everyone to have a place in the conversation. That is the truth, I want everyone's needs to be considered. My deepest longing is for a conversation to take place about the long view that can hold everyone's concerns, and my prayer is that someone emerges that can facilitate that conversation whether it is a politician or not. It has to be someone who really listens and who really hears the real fears on both sides."

## Welcome to the discussion.

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**Don't Threaten.** Threats of harming another person will not be tolerated.

**Be Truthful.** Don't knowingly lie about anyone or anything.

**Be Nice.** No racism, sexism or any sort of -ism that is degrading to another person.

**Be Proactive.** Use the 'Report' link on each comment to let us know of abusive posts.

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## PHOTO GALLERY – THE HERALD DISPATCH



Country music star and West Virginia native Kathy Mattea performs as part of the Marshall Artists Series on Friday, Dec. 12, 2014, at the Keith-Albee Performing Arts Center in Huntington.



Crowds begin to find their seats before the show as country music star and West Virginia native Kathy Mattea performs as part of the Marshall Artists Series on Friday, Dec. 12, 2014, at the Keith-Albee Performing Arts Center in Huntington.

Bishop Nash/The Herald-Dispatch



Doug Reynolds opens the ceremonies as country music star and West Virginia native Kathy Mattea performs as part of the Marshall Artists Series on Friday, Dec. 12, 2014, at the Keith-Albee Performing Arts Center in Huntington.

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