

the Mary Janes *a biography*

As a rock capital, Bloomington may not be the next Seattle, but the Indiana university town has its own rich vein of distinctive music. Amid the farmland and libraries, the Midwestern work ethic and congenital lack of pretense – leading to strong-backed pop music as clear and pure as spring water – meets a rural sensitivity whose call only country music can answer. John Mellencamp is the local Top 40 titan, but lower Indiana has also been home to The Gizmos, The Vulgar Boatmen, Mysteries of Life, Blake Babies, Antenna, John Hiatt, Lisa Germano and the Mary Janes, all of whom put real life to music with honesty and emotional depth that won't be sold short by crass commercialism.

Janas Hoyt, the singer-guitarist who leads the Mary Janes, writes plain-spoken poetry about love, faith, loss, pain and joy and sings them with compelling honesty to music that comfortably mingles the values of old country, new Americana, hard-edged indie rock and classic pop. On the group's second album, *Flame*, she inscribes the boundary between regret and sorrow, detailing how the former comes and goes in our lives while the latter is a path we must follow when it calls. The album is a song cycle about finding the redemption of truth in the human struggle with loss.

Born and raised in Indianapolis, Hoyt studied theater and fine art, although music was always an important form of self-expression. (Her first band was an all-female punk trio named the Altered Boys.) After living in New York for a time in the '80s, Hoyt returned home to Indiana with something to sing about – a young son. She began writing songs, and joined the touring incarnation of the Vulgar Boatmen, the critically acclaimed bi-polar musical entity based on the songwriting and recording partnership of Indianapolis-based ex-Gizmo Dale Lawrence and Florida college professor Robert Ray. Hoyt sang background and provided percussion (no musician has *ever* shaken a B-B-filled egg with more full-on feeling than Janas Hoyt) for the Boatmen from 1992 to '94, when she decided her own music needed her full attention.

Hoyt first formed the Mary Janes as a side project in 1993, with fellow Boat(wo)man violist Kathy Kolata. The group built its signature sound – Hoyt's voice and songs colored with the strength of strings – with local shows and soon began recording. The first Mary Janes release was a 1994 single, "Telescope" b/w "Baby Honey." They began working on an album in 1996, but independent label travails delayed its release. When it did finally appear, in July 1999, *Record No. 1* met with abundant critical praise. Bill Wyman of the online magazine *Salon* called it "an unprepossessing gem - entrancingly subdued, empty of postmodern posturing, filled instead with older, and, some would say, better things: beauty, ambition and something like grace." Tom Dunphy of *The Irish Voice* described a "high lonesome sound that owes as much to the Velvet Underground as it does to Hank Williams." David Lindquist of the *Indianapolis Star* wrote, "Hoyt has the outsized rock'n'roll spirit of a young Lou Reed or Bruce Springsteen."

While concentrating on completing and promoting the Mary Janes' debut in the late '90s, Hoyt found some time for a few freelance assignments. Through Paul Mahern, who produced and engineered the "Telescope" single, Hoyt met John Mellencamp, who had her sing on his 1998 album *John Mellencamp* and invited her back for 1999's *Rough Harvest*. (Another fan is Walter Salas-Humara of the Silos, who included Janas's song "Part of Me Now," retitled "Rejuvenation," on his solo album Radar.) She also recorded an EP by Lola – a side band with Freda Love (Mysteries of Life, Blake Babies) and other Indiana friends – that came out on Flat Earth Records in early 1999.

Now the Mary Janes – Hoyt and string player Heather Craig, a graduate of Interlochen Arts Academy – are back with a new album. Flat Earth will release *Flame* on March 20th. An affecting collection of strong melodies and stronger emotions, *Flame* lets guitar feedback grow amid rustic folk and uses both pedal steel and accordion without drifting towards Nashville or New Orleans. What unifies this diverse collection is the truth of genuine experience and a singer of exceptional skill and depth.

Between twin beacons of idealism and emancipation – "Junie Moon" 'morning comes, to those who wait' and a charging rendition of Tom Petty's "Free Girl Now" – *Flame* illuminates far darker corners of the world. In "Bruises and Breaks," the protagonist escapes a life that would have killed her, and a girl's date for a square dance "Downtown" leads to murder. The spare and solemn six-minute "Subtract the Night" offers the haunting observation that 'women cry and women fall, and you might as well be the cause of it all.' But Hoyt is no Southern Gothic and the Mary Janes are equally able to cozy up and get all big-mama sexy in "All I Want," dance a jig in "Better Way" and take a sweet view of romantic obsession in the atmospheric "Telescope."

The Mary Janes will be touring in support of *Flame* through the spring and summer.

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