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CAYLEE HAMMACK, INGRID ANDRESS & MORE STUN AT CMT NEXT WOMEN OF COUNTRY SHOWCASE



Billboard and CMT joined forces for the second annual *Billboard Live Featuring CMT Next Women of Country* on Monday (June 3), featuring a versatile lineup of performances by Caylee Hammack, Ingrid Andress, Lauren Jenkins and The Sisterhood Band. Hosted by CMT's Leslie Fram, the evening served as an introduction to the up-and-coming singers with each act performing a three-song set.

Jenkins kicked off the evening at Analog at the Hutton Hotel in Nashville, with three songs featured on her debut album, *No Saint*. Prefacing "My Bar," she joked that the setting was unlike the bars she's played before as the room was silent and attentive throughout the entirety of her set.

"It's so cool to be here with all these women. There is something really special about telling stories with female voices," she said before singing "Running Out of Road," which was a co-write with three other women. "We just communicate in a different way. I love writing with men too, but there's something special about collaborating with women whether you're opening a show with them or writing music with them." Jenkins also performed the title track of her album, which she penned with Andress and featured her smoky vocals. An eight-month process, she said the deeply personal song was a hard one to write because she wasn't ready to be O.K. with her flaws and imperfections. "But now I am," she said. "I think not being a saint is what makes us human."

The Sisterhood Band followed Jenkins' set and the duo, made up of Alyssa Bonagura and Ruby Stewart, energized the crowd with stunning harmonies and clever wordplay. With Bonagura on guitar and Stewart on tambourine, the women captivated the room with their musicianship and the stories behind their songs. The feel-good "Get Up and Go" impressed while the duo segued into a snippet of Ariana Grande's "Thank U, Next." The relatable "Bullet" had the women admitting that they dodged a bullet with some of their exes.

Bluesy crowd pleaser "Half Way" was written during a rocky ride on Stewart's father's plane in which the women said they felt like they were in a scene from *Almost Famous*. They further explained that Rod Stewart's "really great" wine collection kept them "pretty turnt" while writing the song. Ruby also shared her father's encouragement heard on the voice note of their song: "'Go on girls, it sounds so good!' We tried to put it on the track but it didn't work out because there's a curse word on there," she recalled with a laugh.

While the Sisterhood Band kicked things up a notch with their high-energy set, Andress brought the emotion and captivating storytelling to her three-song performance. New song "Both," inspired by the dating app Bumble, had the singer telling the room that it's alright to assert yourself in a relationship.

"I have hacked into my friend's Bumble accounts and tried to match them with people without them knowing," she said. "So far it hasn't gone very well but I did learn a lot about it. A lot of times we forget that there's another human being on the other side of our phone. This song is for my friends who are on Bumble and to let them know it's O.K. to stick up for what you want in a relationship. You can lay the line down and it'll be fine as long as you stick up for yourself."

She later prefaced the heart-wrenching piano ballad "More Hearts Than Mine" and female empowerment anthem "Lady Like" by admitting, "all my songs are emotional so drink up while you can," before sharing her gratitude to share the stage with three other female acts.

"I am very blessed and honored to share a stage with the rest of my fellow female comrades. Honestly, it takes a lot of work. It's not just looking pretty every day," she said. "It's really nice knowing that you have a bunch of female artists supporting you and I support them just as much. These are tough times, everybody, but it's nice to hang out with other cool girls that support you, too. There's something about being supportive of another female that seems very rare these days, and I'm very fortunate to be in this group of women coming up."

Hammack closed out the evening with a high-energy full-band performance and shared her journey to Nashville with the audience. "I was 19 when I had my heart broken for the last time in my little hometown. I threw my stuff in trash bags, drove to Nashville, and slept in the Target parking lot in Brentwood. It's a really nice parking lot if you ever have to do it," she said.

Eventually, she got a gig at a local bar on Broadway with the help of her fake ID. "My daddy always told me I went to the university of hard knocks and honky tonks. That was my two-year degree, working downtown," she added.

Her lively performance included the infectious "Just Friends," a song about a boy she should have never dated. Hammack's star power was evident on the stage while backed by percussion and a guitar as she played a child's xylophone alongside her bandmates. The singer's storytelling was at the forefront as she prefaced the emotional "Small Town Hypocrite," a song about an old boyfriend who cheated on her. By the end of the night, she had the entire room singing along to her debut single "Family Tree."

Billboard Live Featuring CMT Next Women of Country serves as the kickoff to CMA Fest in Nashville, where Hammack, Andress, the Sisterhood Band and Jenkins will all perform throughout the week. The 2019 CMA Fest is held throughout Music City this week June 6-9.