

Just Festival 2015: Austin Sound Exchange



It's 2pm in Edinburgh, but it's only 8am in Austin, Texas. Not many of us look too bright at that time in the morning, but Sarah Dossey (banjo/vocals) and Jesse Schaefer (especially Jesse Schaefer...) (bass) are all smiles and enthusiasm, and if Andrew Goolsbee is a little more serious it's only because he's concentrating on his violin. The trio throw themselves into the opening sets of Austin Sound Exchange's first performance at Central Hall, Tollcross with two numbers, *Don't Ya Cut Me Down* and a lively rendition of *Blind Billy*.

The Exchange is a non-profit collaboration of musicians and vocalists who have come together to share the country, folk, blues and Americana of their home city – one which has more live music venues per capita than any other in the US. This is their first visit to Scotland; at least the sun is shining intermittently, and if they're freezing, they manage not to look like it.



More Exchange members now join the stage, including singer Marie Ring, whose strong singing blends well with Dossey's higher pitch. Clayton Ring, one of the Exchange's featured artists, now takes the lead role, and the sound is amped up with drums, keyboard and electric guitar. Ring's assured voice has a wonderful rich tone; he reminded me of Glen Campbell, but that is because I am Very Old. His self-penned *I'll Be The One* is inspired, he tells us, by the idea of living in the moment, seizing the day. *I Won't Back Down Again* was written when Ring was suffering from acute Meniere's Disease, during which time he wondered if he would ever be able to perform again; luckily for us he's much better now.



After a slightly chaotic changeover (this is, after all. their first encounter with the venue), the lead is taken over by another Sound Exchange featured singer and blues guitarist, Chris Beall. Beall's voice is quite different from Ring's, slightly husky, rougher around the edges; to me it says saloon bars and railroads and all those things we – no doubt erroneously – associate with the West. *Dug Down Deep* is the story of his father's ('the motorcycle man') debilitating bike racing accident and subsequent rehabilitation; it's played to a thumping beat, which does threaten to drown out the vocals a little bit at some points. It's followed by *Half A World Away*, in which Beall is accompanied by singer Amy Hooper; the two voices complement one another excellently, Beall now well into his stride and sounding more confident with each number. Hooper also plays flute, though the sound system could probably do with a little adjustment to allow us better to enjoy this.



The Exchange bring the session to a close with a rip-roaring finale; all of them clearly get a kick out of performing, and it's refreshing to see people not afraid to look happy on stage. I am sure that the issues with the sound system in this first performance will now have been resolved, so if you like a bit of foot-stomping Texas music of an afternoon, get yourself along to the Central Hall this week.

Austin Sound Exchange will be at Central Hall, Tollcross as part of the 2015 Just Festival at 2pm every day this week, last performance on Saturday 29th August. Tickets cost £10 and are available from [eventbrite](#), the [Fringe Box Office](#), the [Just Festival Box Office](#) or on the door (subject to availability). All images (c) Austin Sound Exchange and members.

