



ALWAYS GETTING GREENER

AUSTRALIAN GUITAR HEADS BEHIND THE SCENES AT WOODFORD FOLK FESTIVAL TO OBSERVE THE CONTINUED RISE OF LOCAL BLUES GUITARIST TURNED SONGWRITER KARA GRAINGER. SHE NOW CALLS LA HOME AND SOME OF THE BEST INTERNATIONAL PLAYERS HER BANDMATES.

STORY **SAM FELL** PHOTOS **JOERN HARRIS**

In the far reaches of the campground, where the temperature soars to 40+ degrees and where fellow campers shimmer in the heat, no one can hear you scream. Here at Woodford though, we like it like that, we thrive on it in fact, and so it's with a sweaty, sticky enthusiasm that we walk the trail from HQ, down the long dusty road, through the gates and into the humidity that is the Woodford Folk Festival. It just so happens that the first stop once you've traversed the entry is the Blues & Roots stage, and today, the day before New Years Eve to be

precise, it's to the subtle sounds of Kara Grainger and band that we're eased into an evening of music, most more scorching than the day itself.

The Sydney born, LA based Grainger is on song tonight and it's easy to see she's got a certain bluesy something which is endearing her to most of the crowd and which could easily take off and become something monstrous. It's an interesting set to be sure, a subtle mix of pop-tinged blues and Americana, a set which Grainger later remembers fondly when I catch up with her a week or so afterwards.

"It felt brilliant, that was a longer set so we were able to mix it up a bit more, and my brother [Mitch Grainger, harmonica] came up for that one," she enthuses about one of five sets she played over the Woodford week.

"All those sets I played up there had a different feeling really, but they were all great," she goes on. "And the band, they really great, I had Chris Mawer on bass, Jacob Cook on drums and Lachlan Doley from the Hands on keys, it was fantastic."

Festivals like Woodford, and Bluesfest where Grainger will play again in March, are where she feels in her element - she remarks that outdoors is where she feels most at home. Her band, a veritable who's who of local players, is also something Grainger has become used to; sharing the stage and studio with players from all walks

Green River, some people going so far as to liken it to the early works of Bonnie Raitt.

"I think that's particularly because of the first track on the album, that does sound a lot like some early Bonnie stuff, which wasn't intentional," Grainger laughs. "But my producer [David Kalish] worked with Little Feat for a while, and Bonnie's music uses a lot of those Little Feat grooves. So I think that we would both have similar influences, and given I haven't listened to a lot of her stuff, I think I've come from listening to more of her influences as opposed to Bonnie Raitt herself."

Grainger spent the majority of the '90s as guitarist for Sydney blues band, Papa Lips, before joining the Steve Prestwich Band, so *Grand And Green River* is hardly a rookie effort. Here is the result of an artist stretching out and finding

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of music, and all levels of success, in addition to the Woodford group, Amos Lee, Little Feat skinsman, Richie Hayward, guitarist Eric Johnson and Reggie McBride (Stevie Wonder and John Lee Hooker).

"I guess I fell in with a real music community, and it's a real family there once you've been there for a couple of years," Grainger says of working with cats like these as she has been based in LA, since 2005 after leaving the Steve Prestwich Band. "So I've been involved in a couple of other projects as well whilst I've been doing my own thing...in LA I seem to end up with a lot of different people."

The majority of the aforementioned internationals Grainger worked with on her debut record, *Grand And Green River* - which was released in May last year to great acclaim - something which took Grainger slightly by surprise.

"Yeah, it did get a pretty good reaction over all," she muses. "I'm just really happy with the overall production, it feels good. So I knew it was good, I was happy with it, but it's all just a matter of taste, some people will like it, some won't. As an artist, I think the most important thing is how you feel about it." It stands as a bonus then, that fans and media have been so supportive of *Grand And*

her own voice, and it deserves the accolades it's notched up. Next up for Grainger then, is an acoustic EP to be produced by Jeff Lang, something which promises to be a departure from the electric blues/soul/pop prevalent on her record, and indeed something which also promises to be an extension into the songwriting and musicianship Grainger has exhibited thus far.

Sweating on the grass at Woodford then, Grainger's potential is easy to see, and once she matures properly into the role she's set herself, the sky will indeed be the limit.

