

Clairo graces Charlotte's stage on the opening night of her North American tour.



“Welcome to the Sling tour!” exclaimed 22-year-old Claire Cottrill, artistically known as Clairo, in between verses of the first song the singer had played for a live audience in nearly two years.

Spanning the North American portion of the tour with opener Arlo Parks, an up-and-coming Black artist recently nominated for their first Grammy awards, the *Sling* tour was a night characterized by breathtaking music and talent. Parks performed a short melody of highlights from her debut album, *Collapsed in Sunbeams*, before giving a small speech and allowing for the minimal yet powerful stage props of lamps and lounge chairs to be prepared for the main act.

Appearing behind a velvet curtain backstage, flashlights and the uproar of fans illuminated the crowded Fillmore in Charlotte, N.C, as the songstress took a seat at the piano center stage. In contrast to her 2019 *Immunity* album and accompanying tour, Clairo traded in her signature look of crop tops and ponytails for a chic black suit and replaced her electric guitar with an acoustic version.

Opening with *Bambi*, a song recalling the artist's struggles as a woman in the music industry, sets the tone for the remainder of the show. *Sling* walks listeners through personal struggles with mental health, the tribulations of an ongoing pandemic, and fear of the future; a shared feeling of respect fell over the audience as we listened through the intimate setlist. “I’m stepping inside a universe designed/Against my own beliefs.” Clairo sings.

Departing from the internet-coined “bedroom pop” into a mature and refined album filled with bassoons and string arrangements, reminiscent of 1970’s folk pioneers like Joni Mitchell, Cottrill, and her seven-piece band crooned three songs from her sophomore project to open their debut performance. Rising from her ivory keys, Cottrill stood before the crowd and smiled as the notes to *North*, a deep cut from her *Immunity* album, began to play.

The romantic and yet nervous nature of Cottrill's debut album, *Immunity*, eases its way into the show, which excites the audience every time the beginning notes are recognized. Many songs on her first LP have the nature of yearning for reciprocation, such as *Bags*, which currently boasts over 100 million streams on Spotify. In the past, it seemed as if Cottrill was searching for her place in a relationship as she sang, "Can you figure me out?" yet now, she searches for the same within the tumultuous music industry.

On *Blouse*, the first and only single of the *Sling* record, the stripped guitar and vocals carry her disappointment and longing for acceptance. “Why do I tell you how I feel/When you’re just looking down the blouse?” An undertone of angst presented in her voice as the soft guitar lulled through the calm crowd. Cottrill appeared to be struggling with her emotions at some points during the song, as the brutally honest and bitter lyrics she reverberates off the microphone still carry weight.

Aging is a common theme within the Clairo universe. On this latest release, managing being grown whilst still not being respected by musical peers and people who hold power within the music industry takes center stage. “You are equipped and prepared for a professional conversation,” Clairo states in a newsletter sent out to fans with the release of *Blouse*, “and all of a sudden, you see a male colleague staring down your shirt halfway through a sentence.”

After a string of tearjerkers and piano-led tracks, Cottrill played a new song titled *Nomad*, which brings together the pop-inspired tracks from her debut album, and the toned-down style of *Sling*. Sitting at her piano once again, the band accompanies her as she sings of missing someone, in a more mature and sophisticated manner than her songs of the exact nature on *Immunity*.

For a timid and reserved person like Cottrill, pushing out strong messages via music is a feat. Yet, the lyricism and accompanying harmonies that span the entire sophomore project allow for a moving live performance. One stand-out, *Reaper*, features Clairo’s worries about the future and the fears associated with growing older and “settling down”. Cottrill, the percussionist, and her guitar serenade the sold-out venue for one of the quieter moments of the night.

The setlist winds down and Clairo approaches the final song, *Management*. The string-heavy and emotive closer of *Sling* encapsulates the singer’s trepidation for the future and the message of her second full project in one go. The singer took a break from her seriousness to grin and step away

from the microphone to celebrate her first night of the tour within the outro of the wistful and bright track.

Opting for a classic fan service encore, the quintessential gen z song *Pretty Girl* cut the heavy setlist and allowed for imaginary hair twirls and edge-of-bed feet kicking, rather than tear-inducing tracks of *Sling*. Poking fun at the unserious nature and virality of the song, “You thought you had seen the last of this song,” Cottrill coyly joked, “But you haven't.”

Filled to the brim with intense emotions, alluring instrumentation, and production by industry gem Jack Antonoff of *Bleachers*, Cottrill blossoms on stage thanks to the excellence of *Sling* and quarantine-aided artistic growth and maturity. Accompanying band and silky smooth opener Arlo Parks tie the intimate yet accessible night of music together in a charming way.

At its core, the *Sling* tour provides die-hard fans and casual listeners alike insight into the life of Claire Cottrill, and fortunately, fans across the states and Europe will be able to enjoy the show over the coming months, which will only improve given the superb performance night one.