

## **SXSW Review: Laura Marling**

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(Central Presbyterian Church, midnight Friday)

In retrospect, the soaring nave of the Central Presbyterian Church was the perfect venue for English singer-songwriter Laura Marling. Propelled by a clear and elegant voice that swooped and darted like a sparrow through the vast, A-framed space, Marling's songs, crowded to the bursting point with verbiage and imagery, had room to breathe and expand.

A performer who came highly recommended on the basis of two EPs and a debut album, "Alas I Cannot Swim," Marling has only been performing since 2006 and is, as they say, in her tender years (her SXSW bio states that she is just 18). Nonetheless, she conducted herself with aplomb, putting the audience — many of whom seemed vaguely discomfited sitting in church pews after a night of drinking and carousing — at ease with gently self-deprecating humor. "I feel like I should say something important that would change your lives," she said at one point, "But I don't have anything."

Partnered with a multi-instrumentalist accompanist, Marling put wings to subjects both light and dark in songs like "Ghosts" and "My Manic and I," punching the keystone lyrics with extra emphasis. In her crystal tone and delivery, there were hints of both Joni Mitchell and Sandy Denny.

Marling's body of work is small, her breadth of experience limited and her lyrical tools not yet wholly sharpened (I, for one, would like to see her pare down her verbiage — there's too much to absorb for proper reflection). But she seems self-assured, talented and she has time on her side. A church seemed like a good place for her and her listeners to count their blessings.