

12 Best Things We Saw at MerleFest 2016

From Jason Isbell's triumphant headlining set to Old Crow Medicine Show's super-charged strings

Best Spirit of Doc Watson: April Verch



Photo: Misty McGuire Case



While the masses flocked to the main-stage acts, the heart and soul of MerleFest lived in the small venues, where acoustic sets echoed Doc Watson and his son Merle, whom the festival honors. Nobody embodied that sound like fiddler April Verch. Steeped in the old-time traditions of her native Canada, she and guitarist Alex Rubin and bassist and banjo player Cody Walters embroidered their show with old field recordings, native ballads and Swedish folk songs. When Verch launched into a step dance once performed by lumberjacks, the crowd swooned. On top of that, her playful take on "If You Hadn't Gone Away," a 1920s torch song, topped the jazz card at MerleFest.