

# Jessica Lea Mayfield

## *Sorry Is Gone*



Photo credit: Ebru Yildiz

"The whole record is about me taking my life back, without really realizing it," she says. "I realized I'm the only person that is going to look out for me. I have to be my main person. No one else."

Jessica Lea Mayfield might make some people uncomfortable with the level of honesty she projects on her forthcoming LP, *Sorry Is Gone*, but she's not going to apologize – for that, or for anything else on her complex, confessional fourth album. Recorded with producer John Agnello (Sonic Youth, Kurt Vile, Phosphorescent and Dinosaur Jr.), *Sorry Is Gone* is a raw document of a woman in progress; one weathering cruel storms but finally able to blame the rain itself for the flood. Written as the truth of her own poisonous marriage unfolded before her eyes, *Sorry Is Gone* is a record of permission. Permission to create freely, to escape what is no longer safe and to stop bearing responsibility for things done to her, not by her. As Mayfield sings on the title track, "the sorry is gone." Indeed, it is; kicked to the curb with every strum of her guitar.

Written in the years since her last solo LP, *Make My Head Sing*, in 2014, and her 2015 collaboration with Seth Avett, *Seth Avett and Jessica Lea Mayfield Sing Elliott Smith*, *Sorry Is Gone* became the soundtrack to a highly personal and traumatic story. The Ohio-born Mayfield was quietly enduring years of domestic abuse, smiling and touring while she hid a brewing tempest – and the bruises, too. But lyrics don't lie even as bruises fade, and they started to tell the tale of her marriage before she was even able to; songs often dark and dangerous and ready to confront and claim her life. Written

primarily on an acoustic baritone guitar – out of necessity at first, in her thin-walled apartment - Mayfield started to process the years of hurt and uncertainty through words and melodies that helped her see the light in the darkness.

Though much of *Make My Head Sing* was written music-first, *Sorry Is Gone* began with those lyrics, and, so often, a path forward unfolded itself as the songs formed. "The cold hard truth is you love me too much," she sings on "Meadow," a moody, echoey moment about finally realizing someone's true colors. "The cold hard truth is you couldn't love me enough." It's a brutal line from someone who refuses to be victimized. Evoking the pathos of nineties grunge, the folk confessions of her idol, Smith, and the cool blasé of bands like Luscious Jackson, the tracks that comprise *Sorry Is Gone* aren't devised to make anyone comfortable but herself – but they are there to help share an emotional journal and a certain kind of healing that can only come through music.

"I have to sing about things and write about things that have happened to me as therapy," says Mayfield, who shaped so many of these songs in the isolation of the small apartment she shared with her husband while their marriage fell apart in her hands – in many ways, those songs pointed to the way out before she could get there herself. "That's what connects me to other music I listen to. I want music to make me feel things. This is my inner dialogue, and my chance to get the last word."

Recorded with Agnello at Water Music and Electric Lady Studios, Mayfield recruited a stellar group of musicians for *Sorry Is Gone*, including Avett on backing vocals and keys, drummer Steve Shelley (Sonic Youth, Sun Kil Moon), bassist Emil Amos (Grails, Holy Sons), guitarist Cameron Deyell (Sia, Streets of Laredo) and Patrick Damphier (The Mynabirds, Field Days, who produced and played on "Offa My Hands"). Together, they worked to create an ominous take on love, where hope can exist among heartbreak and the end is only as finite as we make it to be. On songs like the title track and "Bum Me Out," Mayfield bends the angelic notes of her voice over off-kilter orchestration, building an environment of warrior-style triumph; on "Safe 2 Connect 2," she takes stock of the digital world to a haunting, acoustic backdrop that gives a subtle ode to her bluegrass roots.

"Been though hell, there's no telling what might happen in my future," she sings. "All I can do is be thankful for each moment that's my own."

Mayfield has paved an unconventional lifestyle – playing in her family's bluegrass band since the age of eight, she didn't have any traditional schooling and released her first album at the age of fifteen, when she was discovered by Dan Auerbach of the Black Keys. Influenced by everything from that mountain sound to the modern garage, Mayfield has been able to come at songwriting from a pure perspective, lead more by her heart than any textbook. It's what makes the tracks of *Sorry Is Gone* so striking and visceral – there is no filter on the emotions, no rulebook and certainly no excuses for anything she's been through or the candor she fires.

"I'm not going to bite my lip on anything," she says. "If there is one thing I am going to do, it's talk and sing about what I want to. No one is going to manipulate me."

The sorry is gone, once and for all – and *Sorry Is Gone* is a permission slip for anyone who wants to stop apologizing for others, and start living for themselves. ●

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