**KATHLEEN EDWARDS**

For decades, Kathleen Edwards has been a cornerstone of North American roots music.

Since making her debut with 2002's *Failer*, she's spent the 21st century occupying the grey area between genres, swirling together her own mix of alt-country, folk, and heartland rock & roll. It's a sound that has earned its creator more a half-dozen Juno nominations, as well as Top 40 success on both sides of the Canadian/American border. Now in her third decade as an artist, Kathleen Edwards has done more than carry the torch of songwriting heroes like Tom Petty, Neil Young, and Lucinda Williams — she's opened the door for others, too, inspiring a new generation of artists who, like her, blur the boundaries between genre and generation.

A native of Ottawa, Ontario, Edwards was still in her early 20s when she released the critically-acclaimed *Failer*. The album's warm, woozy sound — crystallized on radio hits like "Six O'Clock News" — quickly turned her into one of the era's alt-country heroes. From the very start, though, Edwards' music seemed to exist somewhere out of time, resisting categorization even as *Failer* received a Juno nomination for "Roots & Traditional Album of the Year."

"No one knew what to call my type of music back then," she says of those early years. "The Americana genre didn't exist yet, so they couldn't categorize me. I just made the kind of music I wanted to make."

Edwards continued blazing her own trail with follow-up albums like *Back to Me* and *Asking for Flowers.* By the time *Voyageur* arrived in 2012, Americana very much *did* exist as a genre, and Edwards found herself riding a newfound commercial peak. The album reached Number 2 on the Canadian Albums Chart and Number 3 on Billboard's Folk Albums chart. Even so, a busy decade on the road had left her exhausted. After touring in support of *Voyageur*'s release, Edwards left the music business altogether and moved to suburban Ontario, where she opened a coffee shop called — defiantly — "Quitters."

"Before I turned 30, I toured the world and put our nearly four records, performed on TV, and had an incredible run," she says of her first 10 years in the spotlight. "What's interesting is that I walked away from all of it, too — and when I came back, I felt better than the person who put out *Failer*."

By the late 2010s, Edwards felt recharged and revitalized. When a phone call arrived from Maren Morris, who was looking for songwriting partners for a new project, Edwards jumped at the chance to collaborate. The two musicians co-wrote "Good Woman," which appeared on Morris' Grammy-nominated album *Girl* in 2019. Back home in Canada, Edwards continued to write new material, eventually partnering with producer Ian Fitchuk for the album *Total Freedom*. Released in 2020, the album expanded her sound and her audience, boosted by two hit songs — "Options Open" and "Hard on Everyone" — that both reached the Top 30 on the Triple A chart in America. *Total Freedom* didn't just mark her return to the music industry. It was a rebirth, too.

What's next? New music, of course. Edwards remains a fan of "ripping guitar riffs and good songs," and she's combining both into a follow-up album that showcases her legacy as well as her evolution. She maintains a presence on the road, too, playing her own gigs one minute and sharing shows with her heroes — including Willie Nelson, John Fogerty, and Bob Dylan — the next.

"The amount of things I've gone through might make someone else quit…but quitting doesn't quite do it for me," she says. "I can't help but want to write great songs, connect with people, and see what's ahead. I don't love looking behind, even though it's one of the ways we can see what we've done, so I'm looking forward."