

“A reckoning,” Mary Gauthier writes on the outer sleeve to her newest album, “can be personal, political, or spiritual. These songs inhabit all three realms at once.”

Yes. Yes, they do.

Mary's most celebrated songs — “I Drink,” “Mercy Now,” “Drag Queens in Limousines” — are confessional stories, closely observed, clear-eyed and compassionate. She sings with the unmistakable languor of her native Louisiana, writes with the bluntness of Boston, where she was once a successful restaurateur, and rewrites with the fierce precision of Nashville, her home for many years. Her 2018 release, *Rifles & Rosary Beads*, co-written with wounded Iraq war veterans, received a Grammy nomination for Best Folk Album, and an Americana Music Association nomination for Album of the Year. During Covid she wrote and saw published (by MacMillan) *Saved by a Song: The Art and Healing Power of Songwriting*, part memoir, part reflection on songwriting, through the lens of her most impactful songs.

*Reckoning* (Soundly, Sept 25, 2026) is a dense, carefully nuanced, profoundly complex text, though all nine songs are presented as directly as possible: Mary's voice, her guitar, bits of harmonica. Folk music, of a kind, but not a broadside. Nothing so easy as that. Topical songs with a long view, because she's seen and lived too much of it.

A story, from Nashville, from before. The first time we met, if we even met on the porch to that old pizza joint during whatever conference that was, just a bunch of strangers, small talking between sets. Daylight, still. Something happened down the block, a woman on a bicycle ended up on laying injured in the street. We stood waiting, hushed, not sure. Mary ran straight to her to find out if she was ok. Sprinted.

These new songs have that urgency.

This is not a moment to stand waiting, idle.

Vince Gill has already recorded one track at the center of *The Reckoning*, though, in the best folk tradition, his version of “Some Times” chooses different verses from the many drafts he and Mary wrote together. The title came from an off-hand comment by Mavis Staples, Vince had the beginnings of a melody and a thought about the Orange Blossom Special. While doing research, Mary found a photo of a proud black waiter who worked on that New York to Miami train. The song became his story, our story.

“Heaven” took longer to finish. Mary and Lori McKenna wrote it back in 2014, but neither found a context in which to record it. It, too, is the story of an elder facing loss, of hope, and, yes, of reckoning. One day Mary shifted the refrain from “He'll be all right *if...*” to “...*because* he believes in heaven” and the song finally snapped into place.

The title track, an Aaron Lee Tasjan co-write, is as close to an anthem as anything Mary has written over a dozen albums. “There’s a fault beneath the surface,” she sings. “A seam about to split.” How it feels. It’s not a call to arms (that would be “Judgment Day”), but a profession of hope. Of faith, even.

Gauthier also uses the language of faith to frame the immediate politics of “Soldier of Fortune” (an Eliza Gilkyson co-write), which moves from the cross to the concentration camps to the streets of Minneapolis.

“I think deep faith comes from lived experience, more than religion,” Mary says. “Remember, I’m 37 years sober now. I’ve watched tens of thousands of people get into a better place and have a better life after facing down horrible stuff. I’ve seen redemption, I’ve seen and lived the alchemy of rebirth in this life. I want to reclaim some of these words. They are about the human experience. They don’t belong to any denomination.”

*Reckoning* is a decidedly human experience. Co-producer Neilson Hubbard notes on the sleeve that Mary had suggested Springsteen’s *Nebraska* for a sonic template. “Along with preserving intentional space,” Hubbard writes, “these choices helped shape the record’s intimate sonic landscape.”

For her part, Mary offers a dry chuckle. ““There were moments where the pearl snaps on my shirt hit the guitar,” she says. “And my guitar is not always in perfect time. There are a couple notes that kinda plunk. Perfection is no longer useful because technology has made it accessible to everyone. Perfection is not human anyway. Flaws and foibles and showing your humanity, that’s how we connect. Not perfection.”

And hope. *Nebraska* is a dark, private album. *The Reckoning* gives voice to Mary’s patient, private, optimism. “My sense is that we’re going to get through this,” she says. “The snake is going to eat its tail. We make decisions, and 25-30 years later, they come to their conclusion, and there’s that moment of reckoning.”

— Grant Alden, Morehead, KY, June 2026