

KACEY MUSGRAVES: *DEEPER WELL*

***“The life that we make
Is it random or fate?
Can I speak to the architect?”***

Kacey Musgraves has always been a little bit magic. From the tumbling sparkle of Laurel Canyon acoustics that cascade into “Cardinal,” the swirling opener on the seven-time Grammy winner’s fifth album, *Deeper Well*, the metaphysical and incandescent are even more present and powerful from a woman whose songs have cast a glow on how evolved people live since her first single charmed the world with its hypocrisy-skewering charm.

Posing the questions rather than dropping answers, Musgraves embarks on a journey of lucidation. It is about seeking far more than resolving, and in the vast unknown she exults and finds some of the most compelling melodies in a career defined by melodic innocence yet inherent sophistication. Even more than the music, there are the images and signposts that mark this work – a song cycle of letting go, embracing hope, surrendering to bliss and realizing one’s own heart is the greatest refuge -- with a fresh and beckoning tone.

Saturn returns, cardinals embody a dead friend, love is given and taken, streets rush by, belongings are packed and old chapters deserted, new love blooms, jade bracelets serve as talismans, deep lessons emerge, small details define everything, the woods are a refuge and New York City serves as the same gleaming beacon as Oz.

“Love is the prism,” says the sloe-eyed songwriter of *Deeper Well*, “and my role in it. I make sense of the world around me by looking for balance and I’d like to think this album is for anyone who’s living life and paying attention.”

If there’s one thing Musgraves has done across one of modern music’s most expansive and adventurous creative journeys, it’s trust her gut. Glistening folk-pop and country explorations with just enough bluegrass to spin the modern arrangements organically, she wears these songs like a second skin.

Whether it’s the expansive, banjo-meets-Daft Punk *Golden Hour* (the Grammy’s 2019 Album of the Year), the tragedy and post-divorce rumination of *Star-Crossed*, the Countryopolitan sparkle of *Pageant Material*, or the sharp debut *Same Trailer Different Park*, each recording rang true to where the Golden, Texan was in her life. (Yes, Golden: An unincorporated community in Wood County, Texas. According to *The Handbook of Texas*, the community had a whopping population of 156 in the year 2000.)

For *Deeper Well*, the introspective writer found herself drawn to NYC’s Electric Lady Recording Studio, known as Jimi Hendrix’s former apartment-turned-studio and legendary hub in the heart of Greenwich Village. Often working - with longtime co-producers Ian Fitchuk and Daniel Tashian – in the room that was actually the iconic guitarist’s bedroom, the inspiration came with the simplicity and finger-picked straightforwardness of the Classic American Songbook met with a familiar bucolic shimmer.

“I didn’t know what kind of record I was going to make,” she admits. “Other than the fact that it was going to be soft and organic and honest. My songwriting roots. And about *less* meaning *more*. But beyond that, this album is about who I am in love and what I’m looking for. The songs are very spiritual. I was seeking some different environmental energy for this project, and Electric Lady has the best mojo. Great ghosts.

“It’s ironic that the more woodsy side of me came out in New York City. I wasn’t making this record alone in a cabin in the forest. We were in one of the most crowded cities on the planet, yet, we’d dive into the songs or climb out on the balcony of the studio – and there’d be all this space. No matter what I’m making, I’m always chasing open space.”

Musgraves has a gift of transforming wherever she is into somewhere special. She speaks of dingy Irish bars, meditation initiations, honoring Loretta Lynn at the Grammys, turning 35, creative pilgrimages back to Greenwich Village, and the journal she found herself keeping as she worked on these songs and this record.

“Honking taxis, flashing signs, every culture whizzing by in a period of 30 seconds, historic buildings, hustlers, Middle Eastern mantras blasting through the park, finance bros shrewdly closing deals, jazz melting out of open doors, cuisine you’ve never heard of filling the air, quiet nooks in coffee shops: New York City is a melting pot. I think particles of all those things influence your creative psyche whether you realize it or not... the kind of combination only New York can offer. With the outside stimuli on such full-blast, I found it easy and refreshing to access the blank canvas in my head.”

The music on *Deeper Well* is almost chimeric. Rolling acoustic guitars, puffy clouds of strings and synth, warm bass punctuations, layered harmonies, moments of Celtic melody and plenty of room on the tracks for Musgraves’ silvery vocals. On the bright, almost folksy title track, the 30-something songstress surveys her life and priorities, recognizing what feeds her, drains her and even examines the childhood she’s left behind on her way to now.

It’s in the winsomely aware “Lonely Millionaire,” the ancient simplicity of the hushed “Heaven Is,” the leaving-it-better and letting-go-lullabye “Moving Out,” even in the serene, anxiety-expelling “Sway.”

Deeply personal, universally true, *Deeper Well* is a coming of enlightenment song collection that embraces fear, vulnerability and the joy found beyond the doubt most sentient people wrestle.

Half-joking she offers, “A lot of this record is for anxious attachers, the pulling of the unavailable towards you. Each relationship is a teacher; you live out the lessons you were meant to and realize that no matter what, it is part of the journey. That push and pull and trying to make sense of all that... the songs just came.”

Cipher, spirit, open heart, Musgraves seeks to give her truest self to everything she creates.

Whether the explosive cartoon euphoria of new love in “Anime Eyes,” the hopeful trepidation and fear of opening up again post-loss in “Too Good To Be True” or the tiny ruminations on what she’ll miss when she dies in “Dinner with Friends,” there is a lightness in these songs that lifts listeners up and carries them above the sturm and drang of modern life. Not that escape was ever the end game. Rather it was the quest to the wonder of what life can hold that inspired the woman who’s collaborated or toured with Zach Bryan, Harry Styles, The Flaming Lips, Willie Nelson, Alison Krauss, Miguel, Noah Kahan, Madi Diaz and Troye Sivan. She’s also received GLAAD’s Vanguard Award, *Pollstar*’s Best Country Tour (Oh, What A World 1 and 2) and been nominated for MTV’s Video Music Award for Best Long Form Film and the Americana Music Association’s Song and Artist of the Year.

That quest shapes the idyllic and folkloric “The Architect.”

“There’s all this fucked up, crazy shit that happens in this world,” she muses. “You ask yourself, ‘Why are all these people dying? Why so much unrest and chaos? If there’s a force behind it, is there a blueprint for how it all works? Or is it completely aimless and random?’ I’m trying to trust here, but what are we supposed to learn?”

“I’d had the title ‘The Architect’ in my pocket for a while. One day I got in the room with Shane (McAnally) and Josh (Osborne), and we started talking. It was a couple weeks after the horrific Covenant school shooting tragedy happened in Nashville. We didn’t have answers, but the questions became this.”

“Giver-Taker” was also informed by questions and the cosmic balance of asking for what you need in your closest relationships, as well as “Deeper Well,” which takes stock and creates space that’s genuinely needed as you get older.

“Here I was, in my 30s, getting a divorce, getting in touch with true self love, with who I am and what I’m seeking. ‘Deeper Well’ is ruthlessly clearing things out so there would be room for what I was actually looking for.”

“My scanner is always on. I’m always -- for better or worse – seeking. In the studio, they’ve nicknamed me the ‘Axe Man,’ because I’ll chop stuff down to make room for other things. I like to work backwards by adding elements, then muting and eliminating them one by one until I’ve found the perfect balance, that feels emotionally realized but leaves me wanting more.”

The desire for clarity, to be authentic to herself and others, has created a spacious record. Working with Fitchuk and Tashian, the focus on organic, wooden instruments was about staying close to her soul and her core. In the end, Musgraves can strip her songcraft down to a simple guitar or performance in much the same way her hero John Prine would. That songwriter-first ethos served these delicate expressions of self.

“Sonically, I’ve been craving classic American songwriting,” she says. “Real songs. No gimmicks. The color palette of where those songs came from was everything I felt pulled to. New York is one of the places that kind of record came from. Simon & Garfunkel, the Greenwich Village clubs, fingerpicking and James Taylor. Social commentary. Storytelling.

“I always look for honesty in terms of the songs, and this record is no different. Unconsciously, I think that’s part of what drew us to taking our stories to New York City.”

She lights up. An adventure to match capturing another chapter in a life that merges social justice with embracing the small-town kindness she was raised with.

“*Star-Crossed* was a pretty acerbic album where tropes were purposely larger than life,” she continues. “This is cosmetically very different, but equally true to where I am. I know instantly in my body when it’s right. Ian, Daniel and I make such a nice team because they challenge me but honor [my essence], too. With *Deeper Well*, I’m right where I need to be, which is a great feeling. I haven’t missed anything. I haven’t wasted any time. Once I realized that, it was easier to trust that the universe is writing my story.”

Her story, yes. And so many other people’s stories, too.