

GRACE POTTER – MOTHER ROAD – BIO

Back in summer 2021, Grace Potter took off on a solo cross-country road trip that would soon bring a life-saving reconnection with her most unbridled self. Heading out on Route 66 from her home in Topanga Canyon, the Vermont-born artist spent the coming weeks crashing in roadside motels and taking time each night to deliriously transcribe the song ideas she'd dreamed up behind the wheel, often scrawling those notes onto the backs of postcards and motel notepads. After completing two more trips across the U.S. on her own—and partly navigating her way with the help of hand-drawn maps from self-styled historians of Route 66—Potter flew to Nashville for a series of recording sessions that quickly gave way to her most magnificently unfettered collection of songs to date. Equal parts fearlessly raw memoir and carnivalesque fable, the result is a body of work that goes far beyond the typical album experience to deliver something much more all-enveloping: the original motion picture soundtrack to a profoundly transformative moment in Potter's life, a fantastically twisted odyssey populated by the hitchhikers and outlaws and other lifelong wanderers who roam through the wonderland of her psyche.

The follow-up to *Daylight*—a 2019 release that earned GRAMMY nominations for Best Rock Album, and Best Rock Performance—*Mother Road* marks the start of a thrilling new era of a career that's included turning out seven acclaimed albums, sharing the stage with the likes of The Rolling Stones, Robert Plant, and the Allman Brothers Band, and playing nearly every major music festival (in addition to launching her own festival, Burlington's Grand Point North). Over the course of its 10 larger-than-life tracks, the album fuses elements of soul, blues, country, and timeless rock-and-roll with masterful abandon, thanks to the vibrant musicianship of Potter and her collaborators: legendary keyboardist Benmont Tench, guitarist Nick Bockrath (Cage The Elephant), bassist Tim Deaux (The Whigs, Kings Of Leon), pedal-steel guitarist Dan Kalisher (Fitz And The Tantrums, Noah Cyrus), Potter's longtime drummer Matt Musty, and her husband Eric Valentine (a multi-instrumentalist who plays everything from African lute to synth bass on *Mother Road*). Produced by Valentine (who's also worked with Queens of the Stone Age, Slash, and Weezer) and recorded at RCA's famed Studio A, *Mother Road* fully echoes the ecstatic catharsis of its recording sessions, a process that Potter alternately likens to a tantrum and a haunting. "I didn't have any real intention of making a record; I just thought I'd get into a room with some friends and mess around with these unfinished ideas I'd been gathering," she says. "But then an entire album fell out of me, including all the lyrics—the blanks had been filled in, like my subconscious had created finished sentences spoken distinctly from the perspective of all these characters that were living inside me."

As she reveals, that explosion of creative energy followed a period of emotional crisis for Potter, a turn of events partly triggered by moving back to her hometown with her husband and young son a year into the pandemic. “There was a big piece of my heart that wasn’t ready to go back to Vermont—it all happened about 10 years earlier than I’d expected,” she says. “California had always felt like a new beginning, a place where I was able to step into a community of like-minded weirdos, and through that first winter I started to feel trapped.” After suffering a miscarriage (a particularly brutal medical experience compounded by the fact that she’d unknowingly been carrying twins), Potter began treatment for clinical depression and soon decided to seek the solace and release she’d always found on the road. “I used the rental-car shortage as an excuse to go get our car in Topanga, but the truth is I was going to probably have a full mental breakdown if I didn’t step away from the pressure cooker of judgment, I’d placed on myself and my environment,” she says. “At first, I thought of what I was doing as escapism, and I felt ashamed of that. But eventually I realized I was giving myself permission to do what needed to be done for me to get better.”

Within days of that first road trip, Potter was overcome by memories of past adventures and began piecing together stories set in parallel realities and alternate timelines, each rooted in the unvarnished truth of her emotional experience. “*Mother Road* is a reframing of my understanding of my history,” she says. “It’s an important and powerful perspective I’d never had until this record, and the heart of it is my journey to self-reliance and a sense of worthiness.”

Named for a line from *The Grapes of Wrath*—in which John Steinbeck refers to Route 66 the “the mother of all roads...the road of flight”—*Mother Road* opens on the soulful swagger of its sublimely rowdy title track. “That song is my way of saying I’m not okay, and I’m hoping that the road will at least be my partner-in-crime on this journey, if not a healer,” says Potter, whose powerhouse voice lends the track a certain incandescent grit. A world-weary plea for redemption (from the chorus: “Wherever I’m headed/Mama, don’t let it be down”), “Mother Road” also makes for a prime introduction to the album’s ingenious use of background vocals. “All of those vocals are me, but each voice is a different character I was manifesting in the album,” Potter explains. *Mother Road*’s motley cast of characters includes the ghost of Waylon Jennings and an enigmatic road warrior named Lady Vagabond. On “Good Time,” meanwhile, Potter inhabits the role of a hellraiser called Brigitte as she serves up a groove-heavy sizzle reel of her real life’s wildest moments (e.g., “I breastfed a stranger once at an In-N-Out Burger/Stripped down to my skivvies and danced across the boulevard”). “Writing that song, I was thinking about all the times when there were no boundaries between me and the world at large,” says Potter. “As you get older there’s this expectation that you need to fall in line, that you can’t keep living in a fantasy your whole life. But I don’t know about that. Maybe we can.”

At the heart of *Mother Road* lies two back-to-back tracks that together speak to the transcendent power of bending reality and creating our own myths. Co-written by Potter and the Highwomen's Natalie Hemby (a Grammy-winning songwriter whose credits include tracks by Kacey Musgraves and Maren Morris), "Little Hitchhiker" brings Potter's delicate piano melodies, luminous acoustic-guitar work, and gorgeously longing vocals to a tender reflection on her experience as a nine-year-old runaway. Next, "Lady Vagabond" unfolds with spaghetti-western bravado as Potter immortalizes the lawless superhero within. "To me she represents complete self-reliance and strength, and the permission to be as mischievous or as benevolent as you want to be," says Potter. "She may not have a great grasp on everything else in the world—she may not even have the greatest grasp on herself—but that's okay."

For the closing track on *Mother Road*, Potter offers up an epic piece of cabaret-pop touched with both theatrical flamboyance and devil-may-care attitude. A bit of coming-of-age autobiography in song form, the piano-led "Masterpiece" paints a picture of her libertine young adulthood in irreverent and dazzling detail ("I was the long-lost daughter of disco/Dancing thru my jock-strap dreams/In my funky little Fiat/Chasing down my Masterpiece"). "One of the silver linings of going back home was driving by my high school every day and having all those memories come rushing back," says Potter. "The kids I'd grown up with were there with a million stories about me, and every story got weirder and wilder than the last. But I love that that's how they remembered me, and I love that I'm still living those stories out through my songs."

Even in *Mother Road's* most outrageous moments, Potter infuses her songwriting with essential insight into the endless nuances of life and love and belonging. True to the cinematic nature of *Mother Road's* storytelling, she's also immersed herself in creating the album's elaborate visual components, an undertaking that's involved expanding her talents as a filmmaker and multimedia artist. "I know now that there's more depth to my expression, and I feel ready to bring everything into focus under a much larger circus tent than I have in the past," she notes. And after thousands of miles on the road, countless nights at seedy motels, and a heartrending return home, Potter has made her way to the kind of creative freedom that leaves both artist and audience indelibly altered—a freedom that's undeniably led to her masterpiece.