

MARY CUTRUFELLO

Faithless World

“I don't know that I would stand here and say that we live in a completely faithless world, but there is a lot of faithlessness about, and I think that's a worthy subject for exploration.”

With *Faithless World*, St. Paul, MN-based writer/guitarist/singer Mary Cutrufello returns to the Telecaster—and many other guitars—to make her first plugged-in, turned-up full band album in almost eight years. And turned-up it is! After taking time to explore her quieter solo-acoustic and hard-core honky-tonk sides (*Acoustic EP* and *Fireflies Till They're Gone*, respectively), the whiskey-throated 44-year-old comes roaring back with a fresh set of uptempo, guitar-soaked tunes that explore her classic themes of desire and regret, long miles and bad decisions.

“It's my usual rockin' through the darkness,” she says with a smile. “Almost all of the songs involve either a loss of faith or a betrayal of faith or some sort of relationship with faith that's a little bit fraught. By now, I think people know to expect that from me. But as I've grown, the characters in my songs have gotten a little older, too. And the kind of casual faithlessness that used to be my stock in trade has hardened into something a little heavier, a little less dismissible in the morning light.”

Take, for example, the album's opener, “Cold River,” in which a road-weary lover hits the road after a one night stand, seeking clarity as much as redemption. Or “Worthy Girl,” where the faithlessness is explicit (“leave me alone in my faithless world”) but the pain runs much deeper (“I gotta let you go/I've already let you down.”)

“Lonesome and the Wine” takes place in a hotel bar, as our heroine calmly waits on a man betraying his wife to spend the night with her. “Fools and Lovers” finds another (the same?) woman walking away from a faithful man in Dallas but ultimately unable to connect emotionally with the stranger in her motel bed in California. **Sometimes the loneliest moments are the most intimate ones.**

In “Promise into Darkness,” written about Cutrufello's sister's ill-fated first marriage, the faithlessness begins almost as soon as the rice is thrown. “That's an old song that's been in my live set for years, but I never had a good recording of it till now,” Cutrufello says.

Another old song is “Santa Fe Railroad,” by Austin, TX songwriter Jeff Hughes. Hughes had a band called Chaparral in the early 90s, and they were a big influence on the young Cutrufello, who'd just moved to Texas from her native Connecticut.

“Chaparral was huge for me. I learned so much from listening to the musicians, from watching the dancers...and from listening to Jeff's songs. “Santa Fe Railroad” was my favorite. The dreamy, hypnotic train beat, the gorgeous melody, and the twangy guitar figure made me feel very far away from Connecticut but also exactly where I needed to be on those hot nights in 1991. I hope I've done this one justice, 'cause it means a lot to me!”

The album ends on a humorous note, with “The FedEx Song,” Cutrufello's ode to the delivery drivers of FedEx Ground, a job she's held herself off and on for about 10 years. “It can be a tough gig, but it's good, honest work,” she says. “I wanted to give them—hell, *us*—our moment, a little glimpse into how it can be in the truck. I styled it like an old cowboy song, 'cause a long day in the saddle is a long day in the saddle, whether you feed your steed hay or diesel at the end of it.”

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Faithless World was recorded in Minneapolis with Greg Schutte at the helm again. This marks Greg's fourth collaboration with Cutrufello, beginning with 2007's *35*. “Greg just gets it,” Cutrufello says. “Obviously, he's a first-call drummer and a great producer and engineer, but he also gets *me*. I think it's partly 'cause we're about the same age and grew up with a lot of the same stuff musically, but also after fifteen years of working together on the bandstand and in the studio, we're really just very on the page as far as what needs to happen at any given moment.”

In the moments that make up *Faithless World*, the pages were filled with guitars and amps, effects pedals, and a quest for tone.

“I love guitars, of course. And great guitar tones. But I haven't always reached very far beyond my go-to tones when I've made albums, for whatever reason. This time, I started with a premise: two guitars, bass, and drums. A straightforward rock configuration. We were always thinking of two guitar tracks panned left and right, and then whatever else went on worked around that. And that's pretty much what you hear. I played all the guitars (except the slide on “The FedEx Song”), so it's me in both channels, but that's the effect I was shooting for.

“At first, it was about making the guitars sound like two parts, which can be tough when the same person is playing them. It's like getting the Osborne Brothers to sound like Mick and Keith. But it wasn't long till it became about what do we really hear here, and how do we get that? Is it parts? Is it guitars? Amps? Mics? It was a lot of fun, and between Greg and me, we were able to get our hands on every piece of gear we needed to get the job done!”

Faithless World sings with tones both vintage and modern...but mostly vintage. There's a Rickenbacker 12-string, a rockabilly Gretsch, a couple Teles, a very Stratly Strat, Mary's '65 Vox amp, a '68 Fender Pro Reverb, a hot rodded Bassman head, and more. On the floor, vintage and modern pedals completed the tones.

So mix a thirst for great guitar tone with Mary Cutrufello's already renowned guitar skills and vocal prowess, add a fresh batch of meaty songs, and what do you get? *Faithless World*, a hearty mix of rockin' and introspection that's bound to sound great whatever highway you're blasting down. “Oh yeah, it's a driver!” says a gleeful Cutrufello of the almost relentlessly uptempo album. “It might be the most top-down, car-friendly thing I've ever done. Take it for a spin and you'll see!”