

Maya de Vitry / *Adaptations*

There's a lot of freedom to be found in solitude. On her own, an artist is free to express her voice authentically and without reservation, can make art that reflects who she is at her core. But going it alone can be daunting sometimes, particularly after years spent collaborating with others.

For Maya de Vitry, striking out on her own to write her debut album *Adaptations* was a metamorphic experience marked by liberation, exploration and deep personal growth. A member of the acclaimed string band The Stray Birds, de Vitry had long wanted to release music under her own name, but, as she explains it, had to summon both the "patience" and the "determination" to put her music out into the world.

"It really did take me a while to get to that place of confidence," she says. "These songs were from a time of almost self-exile or something. Eventually, I began creating from a place that I realized would not fit in any context other than myself."

De Vitry began writing the songs that would comprise *Adaptations* in the summer of 2016. She was supposed to fly to Nashville when she found out her flight had been delayed, leading to the serendipitous decision to spend some time alone at her grandparents' cabin in Pennsylvania instead. There, she followed her creative impulses, listening to Neko Case and podcasts and taking walks and jotting down ideas for songs and projects.

She would write several songs during that time, eventually bringing them back to Nashville and to friend and producer Dan Knobler. De Vitry initially approached Knobler to record demos, but, after the two recruited a band (Jason Burger, Sam Grisman, Anthony da Costa) in the early summer of 2017, the recordings sounded so good that the group knew it had a record on its hands. "Basically by the end of the week we were like, 'I think we actually just made half of a record,'" she says. "It was exciting. I had crafted the songs and lived with them and really felt that they were strong and flexible and sturdy."

The group finished *Adaptations* in August 2017, at which point Knobler tapped friend Russell Durham to arrange and add strings and woodwinds to the songs, which were otherwise recorded live. De Vitry is a classically trained violinist with well-honed chops playing the fiddle, too. "But for this, I just wanted to play guitar and sing my songs. And I didn't want fiddle on the record because I didn't want it to be a bluegrass album, so Dan was like, 'What about violin?'" de Vitry says, laughing. "Some of my earliest, most powerful musical memories happened to be in the orchestra, and when I heard my songs and my voice surrounded by strings and woodwinds, I was overjoyed, transported."

Adaptations opens with the cinematic "Wilderness," which invites listeners in with chirping birds and haunting vocals before building to a transcendent crescendo of guitar and strings. The track pays homage to the natural muse found in the wilderness, which inspired de Vitry daily while she wrote what would become the album. That thread runs through much of *Adaptations*, as on the following track "What Said the Moon," which de Vitry wrote after a moonlit canoe ride with friend and fellow songwriter Courtney Hartman.

Where the natural world inspires many of *Adaptations'* tracks, the album also has a deep sense of interiority. De Vitry cites the writing and recording of the album as a personally transformative experience, and the songs present her revelations about friendship, womanhood, freedom and love with great insight and vulnerability.

Standout track "My Body Is a Letter" considers the histories carried in our bodies, and how the body holds tight to love and trauma in equal measure. Sonically, the song's gently driving arrangement mirrors the lyric's empowering narrative of moving forward through honest healing. "Healing and empowerment come from revealing what is written in our own body," she says. "This song has been a gateway for me to begin exploring the experiences of living in my body and to begin finding the feminine soul in my writing. "

"Go Tell a Bird" is a poignant reminder that love knows no borders and was inspired both by de Vitry's reverence for Nick Drake and by a formative time spent living with a local family in Cuba in early 2017. It's one of several moments on the album inspired by our current tumultuous political moment. "While I was writing the album, I was thinking a lot about the personal and the political," de Vitry says. "I landed in Cuba on Trump's inauguration day. I watched the inauguration from a living room in Havana where I was staying with a family. I was processing and unraveling, images and ideas were bubbling up, I was thinking about how I wanted to be as a human and meditating on what I wanted to do as an artist."

Where practically all songwriters consider romantic relationships in their music, de Vitry also charts the importance of friendship on *Adaptations*. "The Key" marvels at our ability to form life-altering connections with strangers, as expressed in the line, "We've got the key that turns the world upside down." "I can be friends with someone who was a complete stranger before," she explains. "That blows my mind. And I can fall in love with a complete stranger and that blows my mind. Everybody out there is a potentially irreplaceable person in my life."

That's not to say de Vitry doesn't turn her writerly eye to romance, though, as on the soulful track "How Do I Get to the Morning," which features harmony vocals from Oliver Wood. "I had met Oliver before, but I was really thrilled he would bring his voice to something I've written," she says. "His voice is just so unique, so captivating and spiritual."

While *Adaptations* may be de Vitry's first venture as a solo artist, it listens like the work of a seasoned artist with an impenetrable sense of self. De Vitry may have had to go it alone to make *Adaptations*, but these songs invite us all to join her on her musical journey for years to come.