

Dori Freeman's inimitable signature sound is in peak form on her fourth studio album, *Ten Thousand Roses*. Raised among a family of musicians in the Blue Ridge Mountains and hailed by *Rolling Stone* as "one of the most authentic vocalists to emerge from the hills of southwestern Virginia in recent years," she's a bonafide Appalachian artist, while simultaneously shattering the archetype by empowering the characters in her songs with personal strength and homegrown wisdom. Through this process, she both defies and expands notions of what it means to be from the region.

*Ten Thousand Roses* follows three widely acclaimed records produced by Teddy Thompson, one of which produced "You Say," which continues to find fans, steadily climbing toward six million streams on Spotify, largely by word of mouth. Freeman has been praised by outlets such as *NPR*, *Rolling Stone* and *The New York Times*, but has chosen to remain outside of Nashville literally and figuratively. She lives in Galax, Virginia, where she says she's been better able to develop her music in a truer way to her personally. "I've never been drawn to living in the city as much as I love visiting them. I prefer a rural, small town life," says Freeman. She also believes that living apart from the industry frees her from the pressure to fit current ideas of what a genre should sound like. "I just make music I like and hope other people will like it, too."

Dori Freeman has always been an artist who's had an eclectic range of influences and the ability to deliver deeply moving vocals in a variety of styles that comprise the Americana genre. True to form, her soaring alto delivery is on display throughout this collection of nine originals and one cover. Freeman wrote the songs on *Ten Thousand Roses* during the pandemic, when, like millions of others, she was stuck at home. She made a point, however, to spend as much time outdoors as possible. "I really observed and appreciated nature during that time," she says. Natural elements such as storm-clouds, wildflowers, and spiders show up as motifs throughout the record, which examines everything from being deeply in love with someone to realizing that you don't need another person to complete you.

Freeman wanted the album to possess an "electric, lo-fi, grunge-country" sound that didn't come across as "too pretty or polished," while also conjuring the feeling of summer. The new sound wasn't so much the result of a desire to go in a different direction as it was just another facet of who she is as a person. "It's a natural evolution of trying new things and picking up on a new sound," she explains.

A consistent lyrical theme weaving its way through the album is defying stereotypes about gender and region. "Appalachian" is a clear-eyed and non-romanticized defense of where she grew up that refuses to use the stereotypical arrangements and instrumentation one might expect on a song about such a subject. She sings: "I'm an Appalachian, I'm a Cripple Creek pearl, I'm a can to ash in, for the rest of the world." For "Nobody Nothing," Freeman imagined a monologue to her daughter in the future. "I want her to know that she doesn't need a person to make her happy—that that's something she can have if she wants, but doesn't need in order to have a fulfilled life," explains Freeman. "The Storm" follows suit—a soaring country rock anthem for women who have had to deal with cheating, lying men only to realize they don't need anyone but them-

selves to make them happy. “I Am” is a meditation on the multi-faceted nature of a woman, who is so often seen as one-dimensional, with lines like “I ain’t a good girl, though everybody thinks I am, I’ve got a mind that’s as dirty as the bottom of a coffee can.”

Defying preconceived notions is important to Freeman. “Up until recently I think a lot of people saw women country singers as having to be ‘pure,’ ‘wholesome’ and ‘devout,’ and a whole bunch of other patriarchal bullshit,” declares Freeman. “But now we’re really starting to speak our whole minds and be like...I’m *not* a ‘good girl’ and maybe I *do* have a ‘dirty’ mind and that’s totally fine for us to write and sing about.”

The set opens with the sonically adventurous “Get You Off My Mind.” There’s also the classic country stylings of “Walk Away,” (a lovely duet with Logan Ledger), the tender ballad “Almost Home,” the punk-infused country-rock kiss off song called “I Wanted To” that is equal parts Lucinda Williams and Roy Orbison, and the title track that is a love song accentuated by a driving tempo. The album closes out with Freeman’s take on “Only You Know,” a little known track by Dion written by Gerry Goffin and Phil Spector. A notoriously difficult composition to sing, Freeman’s performance feels effortless.

*Ten Thousand Roses* was produced by Freeman’s husband, Nicholas Falk, who’s also an in-demand drummer who has toured extensively with artists such as Molly Tuttle and The Wood Brothers. Falk counts jazz and funk as his major influences, so quite fittingly his percussion punctuates the album. Freeman contributed guitar for the first time on her own recordings. The couple are joined by Victor Furtado bringing his skills as the youngest-ever recipient of the Steve Martin Prize for Excellence in Banjo, Eli Wildman (The Wildmans) contributing acoustic guitar and mandolin, the much sought-after keyboardist Sam Fribush on piano, keys, and organ, Berklee College of Music graduate Eric Robertson adds additional guitars and bass, as well as acclaimed multi-instrumentalist Aaron Lipp contributing banjo and bass.

For this record Freeman says she leaned more into pop-inspired vocals than she ever has before. “I did some vocal layers and experimented with harmonies in a way I haven’t on previous records,” she says. The songs throughout the album tend to be shorter, and that was intentional. “I’m a big fan of the radio-ready tight three minute song,” she says. “I think there’s just something nice about a concise, but effective song. It’s like a couple sweet moments you can live in.”

*Ten Thousand Roses* showcases an artist who knows exactly who she is and is ready to push past others’ assumptions about who she should be. Along the way we are treated to the best vocals Freeman has put on record as well as songs that keep us mesmerized by tight, image-driven lyrics. As she sings on “Nobody Nothing”: You don’t owe nobody nothin’ / You built yourself right up from the ground / You don’t owe nobody nothin’ / Now ring the bell and make a joyful sound.”