

## MAYA DE VITRY - INFINITE (long bio)

On June 1, 2023, Maya de Vitry gathered an intimate musical ensemble at The Parlor, a studio on historic Music Row in Nashville, TN, to record five songs over the course of one day. Much of the material was brand new - the session would be a trust fall. But this had been a year of leaping, a year of trust, and Maya was brimming with enthusiasm for the transformative power of live music after seven straight weeks on the road. She was also yearning to harness the emotional immediacy and joyful spontaneity she had begun to experience on stage. It had been a long and winding journey to the playful presence and fierce focus she felt that June morning.

After the disbanding of The Stray Birds, a hard-touring seven-year endeavor that ended in 2018, Maya released a series of solo albums and regularly played live shows around Nashville. But she resisted a whole-hearted return to a life of traveling and performing music. Instead, she immersed herself in Nashville's rich songwriting and co-writing community, juggled dogsitting and babysitting gigs, and regularly scrawled new ideas and song verses down while on ten minute breaks at her Nashville barista job. She also worked remotely with veterans around the country, as part of a songwriting and music therapy program. This experience in particular was sensitive and powerful work, work that deepened her belief in the liberating power of song and storytelling and the strength of vulnerability.

During these years, Maya also steadily interrogated the heart of her own relationship with music, feeling frustrated by the waves of stage fright, numbness, and detachment that often showed up to haunt her live shows. Finally, during a set at AmericanaFest in Nashville in September 2021, she felt a palpable and sudden shift. There were moments that felt free, even playful. Trusting the magnetism of this new feeling, and curious to see where it might lead, she started planning a string of live shows for May 2022.

The tour proved elevating and nourishing, and a few weeks later, she began receiving invitations to open tours for various other artists. The timing was sweet, because she finally felt ready to embrace the opportunity to travel with her songs. Over the next several months, Maya honed her performances by warming up stages for Fruition, John Craigie, Aoife O'Donovan, and Della Mae. Leaning into the exceptionally vulnerable space of solo performance, she worked up the courage to try new songs, even unfinished songs, abandoning ideas of perfection and preciousness.

In between these solo tours, she continued booking shows for her full electric band - and also shows in more intimate acoustic formats. It was a playful and flowing approach, featuring fluid lineups of musicians with whom she connected deeply. Maya worked hard to cultivate a space of warmth for anyone joining her on stage. "It really helped me to come up with a new intention," Maya says. "I would say to myself, to my bandmates, and also silently to the audience, 'after the show, I just want to know, if I've helped you to feel more free'. This really helped to center me," Maya remembers. She was devoted to this practice of reimagining, and to the notion that another experience was possible, on many of the same stages she had played years before.

In April 2023, she embarked on an acoustic trio tour, featuring Joel Timmons on acoustic guitar and Ethan Jodziejewicz on upright bass. Joel and Ethan had long been vital and encouraging collaborators in Maya's musical world. Maya also hired a new friend and recent co-writer, singer-songwriter Hannah Delynn, to help with driving and to work the merch table. When Hannah joined the trio on harmonies for a few songs each night, Maya felt deeply moved by the musical chemistry of this particular quartet. She also felt grateful to finally be experiencing the stage as a place of real discovery and trust. She promptly reached out to Nashville-based engineer Lawson White to arrange a recording session for this specific ensemble.

But as far as the material for the session, she felt certain of only one song. "Stacy, In Her Wedding Gown", a song inspired by a co-worker at the Nipper's Corner Starbucks, had become a staple in her live show and could be a centerpiece of the collection. The song is a captivating portrait of a deeply creative working mother. "One of the first things I learned about Stacy is that her favorite outfit is her wedding gown, and that she wears it as much as possible, simply because she feels amazing when she wears it. She just has a truly inspiring and whole-hearted approach to life. I worked on the song in secret, for several months, and then invited her to a show and played it for her as a gift," Maya says.

But the rest of the material seemed a complete mystery. Maya had a deep catalog of unreleased songs, but with the band members booked and the session on the calendar, she had the unsettling feeling that the precise songs she was dreaming for this ensemble might not yet exist. This, too, would have to be a leap. She had honed the ability to concentrate, even in the midst of distraction - and especially under the pressure of time. And, much of her remaining travel that spring was a solo undertaking. This guaranteed some essential solitude, and meant the road might actually afford her moments to disappear and write. If she stayed focused and open, she believed she might find enough cracks in the commotion to deeply explore a few ideas, and hopefully, to be inspired by new landscapes and serendipitous conversations.

"Baby Elephants" was the first song to emerge over the weeks that followed. It was written while on tour opening for Mighty Poplar, most of it in a flash at a Denver cafe when Maya happened upon a book about how baby elephants are trained. It was finished while traveling through the southwestern desert landscape, and in green rooms while the headlining band sound checked. "We've all been conditioned to believe certain things, and we all have more strength than we know. And sometimes, that strength lies in vulnerability," Maya says. "This is a feeling that I have long wanted to explore. Maybe the muse was on my side because I had the deadline of this session, but there were some very serendipitous things that helped bring this song into the world."

The title track, "Infinite", was written at the end of the Mighty Poplar tour, in a stream-of-consciousness reflection on the plane home to Nashville, with the session just around the corner. In the midst of its gorgeous word rhythms and acknowledgements of the immeasurably infinite reach of any small moment of conversation or music-making, the song recalls a pivotal moment in Maya's own understanding of the mysterious power of songs. "Over a decade ago, I was sitting on a porch in Asheville, NC, and I was playing the song "Dream In Blue". It's one of my earliest songs, and one that I recorded with my former band The Stray

Birds. At the time, I was still feeling pretty self-conscious about singing my own songs. A friend of a friend was on that porch, and she looked up after I tentatively finished the song and said, 'I've been in that song.' Hearing that honestly changed my life. She set me free in my writing, because I felt like I'd gotten a glimpse of the way that songs travel between hearts, and how it can feel like they are written for us, or even through us."

In the final days before the session, as Maya again combed her unreleased material for songs that might fit in this growing *Infinite* world, she uncovered "Are You Happy". It was an older one, a song she had overlooked for years. She strummed through it, imagining Joel and Hannah's voices in harmony, and immediately added it to the list. "This song reaches back to a very specific conversation that infinitely impacted my life, and led me to a lot of other hard questions and choices. For a long time, I didn't want to sing it. But with some years of distance, I can find a way to be inside of this in a new way," Maya says.

The last minute and a half of "Are You Happy" is one of the most stunningly transportive and present musical conversations on the entire collection, a true eavesdropping on the rare beauty of the relaxed rapport between Maya, Joel, Ethan, and Hannah as they exchange gentle, soothing hums across a steady groove. "We didn't even have a specific ending in sight, we were just listening to each other, feeling it all so deeply. There was just so much trust in that moment. It feels like the kind of spacious thing that might happen for fun, late night in the studio, when you aren't recording anymore. Luckily, we were actually recording." Maya says.

Three days before the session, Maya stumbled across the song "Holy", written by Portland-based singer-songwriter Chris Pureka. One of Maya's favorite poets, Andrea Gibson, had posted a video of Chris Pureka leading the song around a campfire. Maya hadn't heard more than a few lines before sensing that the final song on *Infinite* would be a cover, and that it would be "Holy". "I was honestly just drinking coffee and scrolling, and this song leapt straight into my heart. I learned it right away, and I could immediately imagine exploring it with this band in a very beautiful way. I feel inspired to be a part of an interactive ecosystem of music-making, of giving and receiving, and by stepping inside of this Chris Pureka song, it was a chance for me and the band to be a ripple, in the infinite journey of this particular song." The closing track, it opens with a gorgeously exposed upright bass part, and floats with the loose, human beauty that is so characteristic of *Infinite* from start to finish.

Produced by Maya de Vitry and engineered and mixed by Lawson White, *Infinite* is a collection of five songs performed with astonishing depth and tenderness. Featuring Maya de Vitry (acoustic guitar, vocals), Joel Timmons (acoustic guitar, electric guitar, vocals), Hannah Delynn (vocals), and Ethan Jodziewicz (upright bass, fretless electric bass), it is a powerful 23 minute journey that invites listeners into the space of warmth and freedom that Maya has so devotedly created. "I really think you can hear us listening to each other, discovering these songs together. All of the live shows I've gotten to do have profoundly influenced how I emotionally navigate my way into songs, and how to really drop deeply into each moment. There is this balance of losing myself completely, and somehow connecting completely - to my bandmates and also to whoever might find these recordings at any time in the future. It is an intense focus and an

intense letting go, all at the same time. I am so grateful to this crew for being willing to go there with me.”