



## Tara MacLean - Sparrow Album Bio

Written by Kevin Young

Some artists move past songs and never look back. By contrast, **Tara MacLean** mines them for fresh inspiration to put her life in perspective and, more importantly, to find ways to inspire, help, and heal others.

At the core, that's the commonality between ten songs on *Sparrow*, a beautiful reimagining of songs drawn from MacLean's extensive catalogue and new material like the album's title track. Put bluntly, it's music as medicine, which is how MacLean has viewed music since the very first time she stepped on stage at age nine; nervous, reluctant, but taking that transformative step anyway. "Not only did I realize I loved to sing and evoke responses from other people, but it was the moment I discovered who I was."

Produced by Daniel Ledwell (Fortunate Ones, Good Lovelies, Jenn Grant), the record was conceived as a companion piece to MacLean's upcoming memoir, *Song of the Sparrow* (scheduled for release in March 2023 by Harper Collins) – a brutally honest look back at the obstacles she's overcome over her life and lengthy musical career so far.

But *Sparrow* is far more than a retrospective. It finds the PEI-based singer/songwriter looking forward with optimism and dwelling on the transformative power of music rather than the pain and loss that inspired some of the songs she revisits. "I grew up in a very unsafe environment, but music gave me sanctuary. When I wrote songs, it was to get through or survive something. So, I created a safe space for myself through music."

The title track, 'Sparrow,' is actually the thesis for the whole book. It offers up the idea that nothing is unforgivable – though a lofty concept; it's the bird's eye view that Tara MacLean is trying to see the world with these days.

Nowhere is that more apparent than on lead single, 'If I Fall' – a song from MacLean's 2000 record, *Passenger* (the number 2 most added song at Radio in the US upon its release). A song that landed her an appearance on Conan O'Brien, opening slots for the likes of Dido and

Barenaked Ladies, and launched her to prominence globally. It's also a track that reflects MacLean's evolving relationship with her music and the healing process that informed the choice of every song on *Sparrow*.

"I had a hard time re-imagining 'If I Fall.' Originally, I wrote it from the outside in, which isn't how I do things, but I was writing it with TV placement in mind. Back then, I thought it was a bit 'bubble gum,'" she says, laughing. "But as I listened to the words again when we were doing *Sparrow*, I found something really powerful that I didn't at the time; maybe because I was too young to understand what I was writing."

With Ledwell's help, on the new version, she imbues the song with a degree of intimacy that's enhanced by lush strings and MacLean's ability, as a songwriter and singer, to find points of light in the deepest shadows and irreducible value and strength in the times she felt the weakest. Though sparser and more meditative, the new recording seems sorrowful and celebratory simultaneously and throws the healing power of MacLean's heartbreaking but inspiring life story into sharp relief.

The songs are touchstones – tangible reminders of joy, adversity, and grief – as much as they are stepping-stones that have allowed her to process the past and move forward. Some recall particularly dark times. 'That's Me,' for example, a track from MacLean's 1996 debut record, *Silence*, that focuses on a bout of severe depression and her resolve to, from that time forward, "Experience life fully. In all its glory and pain."

We often hear about people's struggles – and while those are still acute for her, MacLean is all about solutions. "I wanted to show that when we hit bottom, there are mechanisms inside of each of us that can catch us and help us find the strength to climb out and up."

That concept of negative experiences prompting positive outcomes is a thread sonically and lyrically on *Sparrow*, something MacLean teases out beautifully on 'Let Her Feel The Rain.' The song she was singing when she was discovered while performing on a BC Ferry and the first she recorded and released. Although written about an experience in the darkest moment of her depression, she says: "It was my resurrection. It's about feeling all of the discomfort of being human and how beautiful getting to the other side of that is. This whole life thing isn't easy, and I don't think it's supposed to be. There's no real way to help people survive it except to try to be a living example of overcoming, of rising."

For MacLean, the act of songwriting itself is a means of healing. "Once I've written a song, it's like the infection has been pulled out of me, and the wound's closed up. I don't revisit trauma every time I sing the song. 'Let Her Feel The Rain' is the scar tissue, the proof of my strength. Even though it's heavy lyrically, the joy and success it brought me are amazing. So, that song, it's one of my treasures. But all of the songs on *Sparrow* were pivotal. They changed my life either as a writer or a person and were important parts of my becoming who I am, of getting to my here and now."

During that journey, MacLean has had to deal with sudden tragedy, something she details in 'Last Kiss' – a previously unrecorded song written two decades ago about the death of her sister, Shaye, as she was sharing a kiss with the man she loved. "The whole thesis is that things happen

in our lives. Then there's this incredible process of getting to a place of acceptance and forgiveness so we can carry on and not be in the trauma forever."

MacLean also includes songs that deal with recent challenges, like 'Lay Here in the Dark' – a track she hopes will offer solace to anyone who's experienced a struggle that requires a one day, one hour, one moment at a time approach to get through. A stripped-down offering featuring understated strings, delicate acoustic guitar and piano, 'Lay Here In The Dark' is an earnest call to find gratitude and strength in the depths of pain that MacLean hopes will leave listeners with the sense that no matter how desperately isolated they may feel, they're never alone.

"I couldn't write about the heights of forgiveness and the triumphs without writing about the depths of tragedy. I couldn't let anything go. I had to tell the truth. A song," she sums up, "In a way, is proof you survived.

In closing out the record, MacLean takes the listener back to her earliest recordings again with a blues-tinged rendition of the title track from her debut, *Silence*. Featuring backing vocals by Jenn Grant and an off-the-cuff, gritty, Tom Waits-inspired vibe, 'Silence' showcases MacLean's soulful, urgent vocal style in a way that's certain to leave listeners with a desire to dive deep into her entire body of work and look forward with anticipation to future recordings in equal measure.

While 'Silence' may be the album closer, it's not the final word. "I recorded the record before writing *Song of the Sparrow*. So I'm probably going to have to record more because there are a lot more songs in the book."

MacLean has often said that the highest compliment she can receive is when people tell her that her songs have helped them. "My dream with the book and record is that people will feel inspired to let go of the things that are holding them back; to see that life is magnificent in all of its agony and all of its joy, that no matter what's happened in their lives, it doesn't have to stop them from becoming everything they can be. In fact, it can be those events that forge us into the greatest versions of ourselves, so we can truly be of service to each other and the world. That's what I want the medicine of *Sparrow* to be."

About Tara: Canadian singer/songwriter Tara MacLean has been an internationally renowned and award-winning recording and touring artist for over 25 years. She's written and recorded six solo albums and two with her band Shaye. A playwright, author, poet and a mother, Tara resides in her home province of PEI as well spends time on Salt Spring Island, BC. She is preparing to release her first book, *Song of the Sparrow* in Spring of 2023 with HarperCollins, as well as the corresponding soundtrack.