

Natalie Merchant

Over Natalie Merchant's 30-year career, she has earned a distinguished place among America's most respected recording artists with a reputation for being a prolific songwriter with a compelling artistic vision and a unique and captivating performance style. With her highly acclaimed Nonesuch recording entitled, *Leave Your Sleep*, which debuted on the Billboard Top 200 at No. 17, Natalie Merchant embarked on a new artistic path, creating songs from literary inspiration which were composed for expanded musical ensembles and orchestra.

Live performances of this new music have been enthusiastically received by her long-time fans and new audiences. Following her symphonic debut with the Boston Pops Orchestra, critics observed,

Merchant has found her medium. Yes, the singer-songwriter scored platinum sales with her pop band 10,000 Maniacs, and she forged a commendably searching solo career in the group's wake. But Merchant's woody quaver has never sounded quite so right as it did framed by flutes, a weaving clarinet, and a gentle harp. Keith Lockhart's orchestra was a full partner in the rich, handsome music. (The Boston Globe)

On May 6, 2014, Nonesuch Records released her sixth solo album *Natalie Merchant*. This self-titled and self-produced collection of 10 new and original songs is her first offering in 13 years and has been ardently received by both fans and critics alike.

With Merchant's expanded work with orchestras around the world, she notes that this experience "has trained her ear as an arranger." About her newest album, Merchant says,

"The way I listen is so different than the way I did 20 or 30 years ago. There are so many mood-inducing textures available to me now—using an oboe, a bassoon, a clarinet, or a cello is going to bring such a subtle emotional shift to a piece of music as opposed to just dealing with an electric band—bass, drums, guitar, maybe organ. I wanted to find a way to blend those two worlds on this record: all the years of making pop music with a standard electric band alongside this new world that is full of symphonic instruments. So when you hear a song like 'Lulu,' the woodwinds and strings really blend in beautifully with electric guitars and drums. And I have the courage now to do a song like 'The End,' which is just arranged for strings. It took years and years to get to this point. I have not had formal music training other than being a professional musician my whole life. That sounds like such a contradiction, but it's true."



Natalie Merchant began her musical career as the lead vocalist and lyricist of the pop music band 10,000 Maniacs and released two platinum and four gold records with the group between 1981 and 1993 (The Wishing Chair, In My Tribe, Blind Man's Zoo, Hope Chest, Our Time in Eden, and MTV Unplugged). Together with artists like R.E.M., they defined college rock and created the first wave of alternative rock bands and what became known as the alternative rock format on FM radio.

In 1994, Natalie Merchant began her solo career with a self-produced debut album, Tigerlily (1995). In the years following, she released Ophelia (1998), Natalie Merchant Live (1999) and Motherland (2001). In 2003, Merchant independently released an album of American and British folk music, The House Carpenter's Daughter, on her own label, Myth America Records. In 2005, she curated a collection of her own work for a double album, Retrospective and another for her former band, Campfire Songs.

Natalie Merchant has collaborated both on stage and in the studio with a wide range of artists including Philip Glass, Wynton Marsalis, David Byrne, The Chieftains, Mavis Staples, REM, Daniel Lanois, Ladysmith Black Mambazo, Tracy Chapman, Dan Zanes, Billy Bragg and Wilco. Throughout her career, Merchant has also been dedicated to supporting a variety of non-profit organizations by lending financial support and raising public awareness. Scenic Hudson, Riverkeeper, The Center for Constitutional Rights, Doctors Without Borders, Tibet House, Greenpeace, The Southern Center for Human Rights and Planned Parenthood are among the social justice groups to which she has been devoted. Merchant has also served as an appointed member of the prestigious New York State Council on the Arts (2007-2011).

