

JOY CLARK HARVEY, LA.

Moving Optimistically Forward

Joy Clark's debut album, *Tell It to the Wind*, spotlights many of the influences the Louisiana bred singer-songwriter/guitarist absorbed while growing up as the youngest of five children in a tight-knit, deeply religious family. She first experienced the power of live music at her parents' church, where she sang, but as a young, queer woman, she didn't always feel like she fit in. "Several experiences inspired my path," Clark reflects. "I thought the guitar looked really



cool and I had the audacity to believe that I could play it if I had one. When my parents bought me one, I learned to play, and I also learned that it was the only thing that made me feel free." It was while studying at the University of New Orleans that she entrenched herself in the city's vibrant music scene, while relishing its traditions and can-do attitude. She opened a tour for Cyril Neville and later performed alongside several other iconic artists. "I view the trajectory of my career

as moving optimistically forward," she suggests. "I've been a working musician for a long time, touring with artists like Allison Russell and sharing the stage with Brandi Carlile and Indigo Girls. I'm really looking forward to opening for Ani DiFranco in 2025 and making a connection with her devoted audiences." However, Clark insists that her art is also a reflection of her personal evolution. Produced by four-time Grammy-nominated artist Margaret Becker, who co-wrote six of the album's nine tracks, *Tell It to the Wind* finds Clark perfecting her soulful, seductive style. "My music comes from living life and maintaining a curiosity about myself and people around me," Clark says. "At the core, my music comes from a desire to connect with others through my own experiences."

joyclarkmusic.com **Lee Zimmerman**

WAYLON WYATT HACKETT, ARK.

A Brand-New Old Soul

Waylon Wyatt has a perfect country-music pedigree. Born in small town Arkansas? Check. Spent summers working construction? Check. A road-weary, deep and soulful voice to match his acoustic strumming? Absolutely. Thing is, Wyatt's a brand-new old soul—at 18, he's a high school senior and one of country music's fastest rising stars. "I truly believe I'm an old man trapped inside a teenage body—like the exact opposite of Tom Hanks' *Big*," he says. "I got pipes on me that make me sound like a 60-year-old divorced smoker. Seems people dig it, though, so I ain't complaining." People certainly dig it—millions and millions of them, spread across Spotify plays, TikTok and Instagram views and, increasingly, concert tickets sales. Wyatt began singing early; as a toddler, he specialized in Hank Williams Sr.'s "Your Cheatin' Heart." By 7, he'd written an original tune, "How to Be a Man." But then his first official single, "Everything Under the Sun," changed his course completely. Released in 2023, it was a perfect outlaw country tune—catchy, aching and sad as hell—and a fitting introduction to the wider music world. He became the first country singer signed to Darkroom—the label behind Billie Eilish—and opened shows for Dwight Yoakam. Wyatt's 2024 debut EP, *Till the Sun Goes Down*, feels right at home alongside new-gen country



singers Tyler Childers, Zach Bryan and Evan Honer. It's a stripped-down collection of heartsick, wise-beyond-his-years acoustic country—lonesome whiskey-drinking music if there ever was. The EP cover is a sunset shot Wyatt snapped out of his school-bus window, and the title is a nod to the summers he spent working with his dad. "When working in my pop's construction business, we work from sunrise to sunset," he says. "[The title's] meaning is that I won't rest until I have my fill. I won't stop until I'm satisfied with all I've created."

waylonwyatt.com

Justin Jacobs

MOTHER HUBBARD WAYNE, N.J.

The Intersection of Freedom and Limitation

Nick Nella, guitarist and vocalist for New Jersey's **Mother Hubbard**, describes the band's threefold mission as simply "to write great music, put on great shows and improvise." But carrying out this "simple" mission is anything but easy, even for Nella and his bandmates, who met in the prestigious jazz program at William Paterson University. The pithiest way to refer to Mother Hubbard is that they are a progressive funk outfit, though that would be like simply calling Ween a rock band. "Funk is a big part of our throughline," Nella says. "We're a weird blend of Steely Dan, Parliament and the Red Hot Chili Peppers." Nella and **Mike Bereski** (bass and keys) write the band's songs together, a process that the guitarist calls "super collaborative," inspired by the way The Beatles worked on music early on. "We start with an idea and finish it together," he notes. And their years of jazz training fuel their semi-structured jams, which at times nod to Umphrey's McGee, Unknown Mortal Orchestra and Billy Strings. Describing the band's approach to performing, Nella says they sit at the intersection of "freedom" and "limitation," where they're "limited" by, say, a chord progression but otherwise are free to go wherever they want. Signed with Gold'n Retriever Entertainment, Mother Hubbard released a live EP in 2024, showcasing their unique interpretations of songs by Bob Marley, Amy Winehouse and The Beatles. "We tend to throw covers into our live sets pretty often and always strive to put the ol' Ma Hubbard spin on them," says Nella. "These tunes, in particular, paint a nice picture of what that usually ends up sounding like, so it felt right to put it out." mahubbard.com **Matt Hoffman**



STEVE RAPOPORT (CLARK)