

# Kaia Kater Explores Identity, Memory, and Roots on 'Grenades' Out 10.26 via Smithsonian Folkways Recordings



Known for her prowess as a songwriter and tradition bearer who performs with "the skill of a folk-circuit veteran" (Rolling Stone), Grenadian-Canadian artist Kaia Kater took a decidedly different direction for her new album, 'Grenades,' out October 26 on Smithsonian Folkways Recordings. What started out as a search to discover the roots of her identity became a physical and emotional exploration of history, in particular her paternal ancestry, and has led to bold new heights of imagination and creative expression.

Listen and share the first track, "New Colossus" here: <http://hyperurl.co/KaiaKater>

Her father Deno grew up in Grenada, fleeing to Canada in 1986 as part of a young speakers program, after the U.S. invasion. His voice can be heard recounting those events during the album's interludes -- a way for the Canadian songwriter to tie her present with his past, in order to understand our current global climate of war, unease, immigration, and displacement. Kater revisits the past in songs like "La Misère" and "Grenades"; touches on the present in "Canyonland" and "New Colossus"; and looks to the future in "Poets Be

Buried."

To fully immerse herself in the story, Kater traveled to her father's homeland -- her first visit as an adult. "Going home to Grenada felt like shining a light into a part of myself previously shadowed," she says. She hoped to find the answers to a lifetime's worth of questions: questions which found their way into these songs as she considered "the legacy of lineage and of fractured family trees."

Kater joins Smithsonian Folkways during the foundational label's 70th anniversary. One part celebration of Folkways' influential role and one part vision of the genre-spanning label's future, the anniversary is the perfect moment to collaborate with Kater, who brings deep folk music ties, a unique and modern background and experience, and exceptional banjo and guitar playing to the roster.

"We're elated that Kaia Kater has joined the Smithsonian Folkways family," John Smith, the label's associate director, says. "Her musicianship and songwriting are remarkable, and her talent in bridging tradition and innovation are a perfect fit for what we do. All of us at the label are big admirers of her work, and we can't wait to jump in and help spread the word of her talents."

Kater wrote all of the songs on 'Grenades,' but had a little help with "La Misère" from an Emory Cook recording she found in the [Smithsonian Folkways Archives](#). "Cook collected songs from the village of Boca in Grenada, which is very near my father's birthplace," Kater notes. The nameless melody caught her ear, so she recorded it. When she couldn't make out the French griot-like words, she made up some of her own. "The song has that half-singing/half-shouting schoolyard call and response, but it's centered around the theme of misery," she notes. "I love having dark themes ensconced in happy melodies. Somehow it feels more real that way."

On other cuts, Kater's pen cuts a more esoteric path, but never overly so. She challenges her listeners to do the work of listening, actively and intentionally, and rewards them for that effort, generously and thoughtfully. "My natural inclination is to write in a puzzle," she says. "I liken it to koans-- tautological phrases which confuse the reader with the absence of a solution. But I'm equally interested in music, because it provides a solid form to back up against. It's important to me, melodically, that it still be a jam, that it still be something you can listen to and dig without needing to know the lyrics inside out."

The gently lolling "Grenades" is as inwardly observational as it is outwardly political in its bardic take on life in the wake of an invasion. Kater's vivid imaginings throughout the album give credence to the idea of a generation's trauma of war and enslavement impacting

descendants on a cellular level. "Our history walks around with us every day," she notes. "I wrote "Grenades" by trying to imagine my dad, when he was a little boy, seeing this all happen. Much of the song's imagery is the juxtaposition of sandy beaches, coral reefs, and lemonade, with war objects like planes, grenades, and bombs. What do those two images do to a child? How do you reconcile them?"

For the album's coda, "Poets Be Buried," Kater brings back her banjo. "'Poets' was one of the last songs to be written," she says. "I needed a closing statement, an aerial view of the themes I'd been exploring. It's a song written solely from my perspective, trying to anticipate the next generation -- my children -- and what I'd tell them about this awful, ugly, confusing, courageous, deeply human time in our history. It's a poem about what I need to tell myself. It's a song of compassion above everything."

As Kater explored multiple facets of her identity, so did she explore varying facets of her sound. She partnered with producer Erin Costelo to create a musical aesthetic that pulled from more than just the Appalachian influences of her past musical efforts. Artists like Aoife O'Donovan and Daniel Lanois figured prominently in the artistic vision.

"I play acoustic guitar on the record, and the title track doesn't have banjo in it, so we knew it would be different right off the bat," Kater says. "We anchored a lot of the sound with guitar player Christine Bougie (Bahamas, Good Lovelies). I knew I wanted Christine on the record, and we built the sound from there."

It's a sound that starts in Grenada, moves through America, and travels into Quebec. It's the sound of an artist forging a new path into the future, while holding her history close. 'Grenades' tells stories of courage and uncertainty; it is an odyssey reflecting on the nature of personal identity, memory, and family-- and how sometimes a person must travel across the world to find out where their home is.

#### ABOUT SMITHSONIAN FOLKWAYS RECORDINGS:

Going into its 70th year, Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, the "National Museum of Sound," makes available close to 60,000 tracks in physical and digital format as the nonprofit record label of the Smithsonian, with a reach of 80 million people per year. A division of the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, the non-profit label is dedicated to supporting cultural diversity and increased understanding among people through the documentation, preservation, production and dissemination of sound. Its mission is the legacy of Moses Asch, who founded Folkways Records in 1948 to document "people's music" from around the world. For more information about Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, visit [folkways.si.edu](http://folkways.si.edu).

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