



IRASCIBLE MUSIC



ANGEL OLSEN (USA)

Album: Whole New Mess

Label: Jagjaguwar

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Web: <https://angelolsen.com>

EPK: irascible.ch/releases/angelolsen/wholenewmess

Angel Olsen will release *Whole New Mess*, her first solo album since her 2012 debut, on August 28th via Jagjaguwar. A super intimate and vulnerable emotional portrait that shows her grappling with a period of personal tumult, *Whole New Mess* presents Olsen working through her open wounds and raw nerves with just a few guitars and some microphones, isolated in a century-old church in the Pacific Northwest.

Whole New Mess follows *All Mirrors*, Olsen's grand 2019 masterpiece (and a top 10 critically acclaimed record). At least nine of the eleven songs on *Whole New Mess* should sound familiar to anyone who has heard *All Mirrors*. "Lark," "Summer," "Chance"—they are all here, at least in some skeletal form and with slightly different titles. But these are not the demos for *All Mirrors*. Instead, *Whole New Mess* is its own record with its own immovable mood. If the lavish orchestral arrangements and cinematic scope of *All Mirrors* are the sound of Olsen preparing her scars for the wider world to see, *Whole New Mess* is the sound of her first figuring out their shape, making sense for herself of these injuries.

To record *Whole New Mess*, Olsen asked for a studio recommendation from Electro-Vox head engineer and a deep kindred spirit Michael Harris. She wanted to find a space where, as she puts it, "vulnerability exists." They settled on The Unknown, the Catholic church that Mount Eerie's Phil Elverum and producer Nicholas Wilbur converted into a recording studio in the small town of Anacortes, Washington. Anacortes would act as a kind of harbor for Olsen, limiting distractions as she tried to burrow inside of these songs. "I hadn't been to The Unknown, but I knew about its energy. I wanted to go sit with the material and be with it in a way that felt like a residency," Olsen says. "I

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didn't need a lot, since it was just me and a guitar. But I wanted someone else there to hold me accountable for trying different things." In late October 2018 prior to recording *All Mirrors*, Olsen and Harris lived for 10 days in a rental and built a daily ritual of getting coffee each morning in a nearby bookstore. They hiked Mount Erie, visited state parks, and strolled the empty streets of Anacortes beneath a full moon. But mostly, the sessions were casual, relaxed, and quiet, allowing Olsen the space to fully explore these feelings.

The results are staggering, somehow disarmingly candid and dauntingly personal at once. The opener and title track—one of two songs here that did not appear on *All Mirrors*—is a blunt appraisal of how low Olsen got and how hard the process of pulling herself back upright was, especially when being an artist can mean turning your emotions into someone else's entertainment. "Oh, I'll really do the change," she repeats at the start and finish, her voice wavering as she tries to buy the mantra she's selling. "The reality is that artists are often never home so health, clear mindedness and grounding is hard to come by," says Olsen. "The song is a mental note to try and stay sane, keep healthy, remember to breathe wherever I happen to be, because there is no saving it for back home."

Considered alongside *All Mirrors*, *Whole New Mess* is a poignant and pointed reminder that songs are more than mere collections of words, chords, and even melodies. They are webs of moods and moments and ideas, qualities that can change from one month to the next and can say just as much as the perfect progression or an exquisite chord. In that sense, these 11 songs—solitary, frank, and unflinching examinations of what it's like to love, lose, and survive—are entirely new. This is the sound of Angel Olsen, sorting through the kind of trouble we've all known, as if just for herself and whoever else needs it.

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