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Ismay Taps into Nature on “A Song in Praise of Sonoma Mountain,” Off Upcoming Debut

Tina Benitez-Eves - January 21, 2020

For Ismay, Sonoma Mountain is where the world begins. There, everything is tied to a life completely immersed in rural California on the folk singer and songwriter’s latest single “A Song in Praise of Sonoma Mountain,” a melodious track paying homage to the landscape where Ismay lives, works, and eventually recorded her full length debut *Songs of Sonoma Mountain*, out February.

Recorded in a 100-year-old sheep barn at Five Springs Farm, a family ranch where Ismay (Avery Hellman) has spent the past five years after studying Conservation and Resource UC Berkeley,

Songs of Sonoma Mountain comes from the perspective of nature and some of Ismay's own reflections on gender identity and a sense of belonging. To accompany the album, Ismay also created, "Where the World Begins," a podcast series of narrative stories to complement *Songs of Sonoma Mountain*'s storytelling.

Raised in San Francisco, the serenity Ismay eventually found in the mountains is evident on *Songs of Sonoma Mountain*, co-produced by Robert Cheek (Deftones, Chelsea Wolfe, Band of Horses), with every song weaved around the sights, sounds, and feel of the surrounding land and guided gently by Ismay's meticulous guitar and delicately captivating vocals.

On "A Song in Praise of Sonoma Mountain," Ismay praises the mountain and everything it towers over—the birds, grass, farm animals, and the surrounding lands. "A Song in Praise of Sonoma Mountain is the song I chose to start my record because it centers on the core intention of this project—to create music about connection to place," Ismay tells *American Songwriter*. "It's where I live and work on a ranch, and it's where I made this record."

To tap into the track's natural elements, Ismay incorporated actual field recordings of birds, frogs, and the wind from the mountain itself and blended it into a gentle, acoustic folk tale. "These elements are their own songs in praise of the mountain," says Ismay. "The mountain is at one time seen as an entity within itself worthy of praise, but simultaneously made up of the things that are praising it."