

Review: Mary Karlzen's diverse set covers range of topics

Mary Karlzen's first album in 14 years is a diverse set that includes an Irish-tinged ballad, a country duet, heartland rock and a piano waltz

By **STEVEN WINE** Associated Press

May 27, 2021, 2:10 PM • 2 min read



 The Associated Press

This image released by Y&T Music shows "Shine" by Mary Karlzen. (Y&T Music via AP)

Mary Karlzen, "Shine" (Y&T Music)

Mary Karlzen's first album in 14 years is a diverse set that includes an Irish-tinged ballad, a country duet, heartland rock, a piano waltz and one brief hint it was recorded for a Miami label.

“When your life's just out of reach,” she sings, “get yourself to the beach.”

The expansive approach on “Shine” fits Karlzen's versatile voice, which like Nanci Griffith and Julie Miller can sound both whispery and steely — and twangy on her duet with Radney Foster, “You Still Belong to Me.” An excellent supporting cast also includes Garry Tallent, Kenny Aronoff, Greg Leisz, Ken Coomer and Daniel Tashian, who won two Grammys for co-producing Kacey Musgraves' groundbreaking 2018 album, “Golden Hour.”

Karlzen, a former Miamian now based in Milwaukee, has written a fine batch of songs with quirky melodies that cover a range of topics, from mentoring and forgiveness to unrealized potential and brighter tomorrows. “I'll Be There” is a touching parental pledge of allegiance, while the rocking “Dumb Game” plumbs a different set of emotions and features a terrific kiss-off line: “I am so sorry I took you seriously.”

Best of all is the title cut, an intimate, reflective, thought-provoking finale. “Is this all there is?” Karlzen sings, leaving the listener wanting more.

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Lost and Found

Records that got lost in the mailroom

by Bob Pomeroy




Mary Karlzen: *Shine*, Y&T Music

Mary Karlzen had a successful run with her folk pop showing up on VH1, scored some indie hits and signed to a major label in the 1990s. Then life happened, and Mary took the next 15 years off to raise a family. Mary and producer Jansen Press put *Shine* together by reworking unfinished songs from the '90s and working up new material. It was an international affair with Mary doing her basic tracks in Milwaukee, Jansen doing production in France, and the other players laying down their parts in studios all over America. You would think that everyone was sitting together in a cozy cabin studio somewhere based on what you hear. Mary's songs are well crafted vignettes of life, loss, and regret. The title track, "Shine," is a heartbreaker.



Shine
Mary Karlsen

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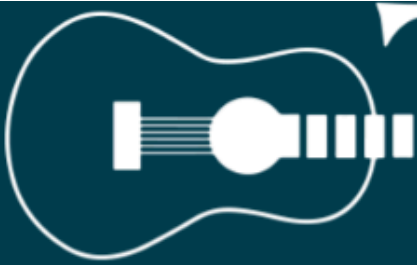
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MARY KARLZEN: Shine

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CD REVIEWS

MARY KARLZEN: Shine

by Wayne Riker | October 2021



Singer/songwriter Mary Karlzen is back in the spotlight once again with her 2020 CD, *Shine*. After an initial splash in 1995 with her CD *Yelling at Mary* on Atlantic Records, followed by two releases in 2000 and 2007 on Y&T and Dualtone labels respectively, the Chicago native took a musical hiatus to spend more time with her two children. Fast forward to 2020 and Karlzen's reuniting with Y&T Music and producer Jansen Press in Miami, a familiar landing place where her musical recording journey began in 1992 with her debut self-titled album.

The 12-track disc, recorded and mixed by Press as well, includes an impressive cast of top-flight sidemen, including L.A. guitarist Mark Goldenberg, drummer Kenny Aronoff and E Street Band bassist Garry

Tallent, to name a few, most contributing from remote recording locales around the U.S. The result is a delightful mix of skilled musicianship behind Karlzen's mesmerizing voice and pensive lyrics.

The opening track, "Slowly Disappear," sets the tone for many of her lyrics of self-reflection and personal growth, backed by a strong country rockabilly groove as the track accelerates, followed by "One Step Away from Home," a reflection of how life's events would all be different upon which fork in the road we choose to take.

Karlzen pens some impressive country flavored tracks with a jug band flavor on "Say You'll Never Go Away Again," along with the two steppin' vocal duet, "You Still Belong to Me," with Nashville based singer/songwriter/guitarist Radney Foster, and the upbeat track, "Try to Find," all superbly backed by the supporting musical cast.

Her vocal diversity is prominently on display with the up-tempo rocker, "Dumb Game," the pop-flavored "Something That I Missed" and a catchy 6/8 Jazz Waltz, "Moon & the Sky." She saves the title track, "Shine," for the grand finale, a lilting piano and strings accompaniment climaxing into a full orchestral finish with the prophetic lyrics: "and now is my time... I've waited a whole life to see what I would find." And shine she does throughout with an eclectic mix of styles and heartfelt words to live by.

Mary Karlzen Chats about her New Album “Shine”

By [Robert Silverstein](#) | June 16, 2021



Based in South Florida, Y&T music released *Shine*, the 2021 album by renowned folk-rock singer-songwriter Mary Karlzen and, with its cross-section of memorable tracks, it's a keeper. Combining modern-day folk-rock energy with pure pop songwriting, the album is a stellar showcase for Mary's music. She's been compared to singer-songwriters Sheryl Crow and Nanci Griffith yet there's also a kind of New York style Marshall Crenshaw vibe on *Shine* as well. A more country-rock version of The Bangles would also be a good comparison.

What era of music history did you grow up in and how did you first become exposed to pop, folk and rock music?

The late 1970's but mostly 80's music was what was playing around when I was in school. I have three older brothers who mostly listen to singer-songwriters like Jim Croce, James Taylor and John Denver, so I heard a lot of that in the house. My dad was a huge country music fan so while my friends were listening to Journey and Styx, I was forced to hear all the old country stars like George Jones, Merle Haggard and Loretta Lynn. I hated at the time, but now I am so grateful to have had that exposure. Once I started working at the record store, the doors flew open to a whole new world and I basically exchanged my paycheck for records. That's when I discovered a lot of the Southern California songwriters like Jackson Browne, Joni Mitchell, Rickie Lee Jones, CSN&Y which I think I gravitated to in my writing. My music collection was very eclectic because of the store and I loved all kinds of from New Grass Revival to Keith Jarrett but also fell in love with Bruce Springsteen, Elvis Costello, Dan Fogelberg and Nanci Griffith. I did have all the Beatles records and some Dylan but they weren't the artists that made me want to pick up a guitar and write songs. The artists that compelled me to write were James Taylor, Jackson Browne, Rickie Lee Jones, Tom Waits, Joni Mitchell and Nanci Griffith, among a few others.

Where and when was Shine written and recorded?

Most of the recording was completed before Covid hit. So when the world slowed to a halt, Y&T did not want to release any music because people were mostly trying to keep from dying so music didn't seem appropriate to release. It worked out well though because I realized it needed to be remixed and remastered so we had time and waited until Covid was getting roped in. I only went into a studio with other musicians for 3 tracks. When you don't have much of a budget, working remotely is really the only option. I don't like it as much but was able to get great musicians to play on it because it was affordable to do it that way. As for playing out, our last show was in Miami in late February of 2020, just when we started to hear about some illness that was going around.

Is there a reason why you call the new album Shine? Is that a positive word to describe the craziness we went through in 2020 and are still going through? Shine back can also mean reflection and God knows we've done enough reflecting this past year.

I wish it was more metaphorical but, the title comes from a song on the CD. In 2019, I didn't really think about music much. We had worked on the song a while back and it was put on the shelf. I didn't like the tempo and it just wasn't right. One night, Jansen, the producer of the last CD, Wanderlust Diaries, sent me an email with the song Shine attached. He said he messed around with it just for fun. One listen and I just started bawling. It was just like the way I always heard it in my head and once again I had that feeling like I needed the world to hear it too. It was the impetus for me wanting to do music again and got the ball rolling on the CD, so it seemed like it deserved the title spot.

Is the lead off track on Shine, "Slowly Disappear" autobiographical and did you write it someone about someone specific? Watching someone disappear is hard no doubt. There's a great guitar solo on "Slowly Disappear", who's playing it?

That song's really difficult for me to talk about. I am sure anyone that has a relative that suffers with a terminal illness or drug abuse or mental health issues will relate to the lyrics. The guitar part was played by the producer of the CD, Jansen Press. He lives in France and is the Gibson guitar 'rep' for a large part of Europe. He's an awesome player and goes about the country doing guitar demo shows.

The Shine album has strong folk-rock roots but it's also quite a strong pop-rock album. A good example of combining both folk and rock is "Say You'll Never Go Away Again". Sorry to harp on the great guitar work on Shine but, again the guitar solo is blistering, who is on lead guitar on that one? Is that track written for someone in your family such as a child?

That's Jansen again on guitar. Yes that song is about my girls. When they were little we would make rocket ships out of large cardboard boxes and they would color them with their favorite colors, pink and purple. When they were very young, they were with me 24/7 and as they grow and gain their independence, the more they are away. It's about that not wanting to let go thing, not wanting to lose that child to the world. Now they are teenagers and I can't stand that I will lose them to the adults they will become. I don't like the passage of time. It's too cruel.

How did you assemble so many great musicians to play on Shine? You've always been surrounded by excellent musicians, even going back to your early albums plus I'm amazed that some of the musicians on Shine, like Mark Goldenberg for example, also played on your 1995 album Yelling At Mary. Also how did you meet producer Jansen Press? The sound is excellent on Shine so I'm amazed that Jansen also mixed the album as well. It sounds clear as a bell with a great sound dynamic in play. What was it like working with Jansen?

When I was first playing around South Florida, the guitar player left and Jansen answered an ad to audition. I was very lucky to find him. He eventually moved to Nashville, where he picked up the producing bug. His wife is a very talented singer-songwriter named Jolynn Daniel so he started producing her music and that led to him to work with others. There are some great players in Nashville so when we decided to record Wanderlust Diaries there, Jansen just called around town to see who was available and it was lucky Springsteen was not keeping Garry Tallent busy at the time. Jansen is great to work with as a producer and would highly recommend him to any artist. He knows what he's doing and super dedicated to getting things exactly right. No pressure in the studio just good vibes and he creates an atmosphere where everyone wants to do their best for each song. For Yelling at Mary, that was produced by Kevin McCormick. He was the bass player and music director for Jackson Browne at the time and he knows all the LA 'cats' so he put the players together. Kevin was great to work with as well. I got lucky to get him.

I really like the cover art of Shine. Where is the cover picture from? So tell us Mary, what are you looking forward to in 2021 and how do you plan to promote Shine? I hope it makes the cut for a Grammy for best pop-rock album of 2020. At least it will bring the album to further exposure and listening consideration.

Oh wow, you made my day! Thanks for the kind words. The pictures for all the artwork were taken at Lake Michigan by my house. The photo was not meant to be the cover or even used. It was taken with a phone so the quality is not great. It just seemed right when we got to doing the artwork. Don't have a whole lotta plans for promotion. It's really difficult to get any traction out in the wild world of music streaming so am I content for just making music for the love of it. Like I said, I've never made any money doing music and I don't see that changing. I am already writing for the next CD. I have plans to record 5 or 6 songs in Miami in early June so that should keep me out of trouble, for a while.



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Album Review of **Shine** [Mary Karlzen](#)



Label: Y&T

Genres: Pop

Styles: Pop/Rock

Written by Robert Silverstein

April 6, 2021 - 4:12pm EDT



Based in South Florida, Y&T music released *Shine*, the 2021 album by renowned folk-rock singer-songwriter Mary Karlzen and, with its cross-section of memorable tracks, it's a keeper. Combining modern-day folk-rock energy with pure pop songwriting, the album is a stellar showcase for Mary's music. She's been compared to singer-songwriters Sheryl Crow and Nanci Griffith yet there's also a kind of New York style Marshall Crenshaw vibe on *Shine* as well. A more country-rock version of The Bangles would also be a good comparison. Many fine musicians back Mary up on the 12-track album including Ben Peeler (guitars) Garry Tallent (bass), Kenny Aronoff (drums), Mark Goldenberg (guitars) and many others. Mary might be well remembered for her Dualtone Records and Atlantic Records albums, yet her 2021 Y&T album is right up there with her finest works. Soaring studio production and mixing work by Jansen Press is another fine selling point. Even with a kind of all-star backing band in the mix, the songs on *Shine* makes it a contemporary pop-rock album not to miss.



Americana Highways

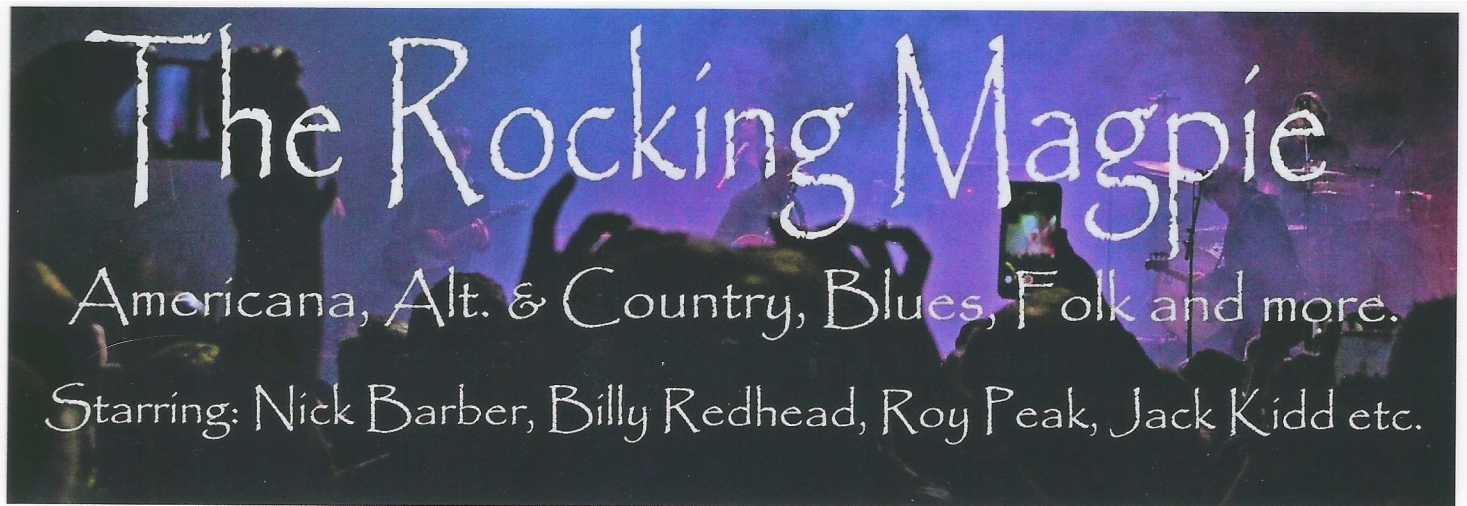
on the road collecting the stories of Americana music

Mary Karlzen, *Shine*. Mary Karlzen has been kicking around the music business for a long time—her first album appeared nearly 30 years ago—but she hasn't exactly been prolific: this pop/rock release is only her sixth album since her eponymous 1992 debut; it's also her first since *The Wanderlust Diaries*, which came out 14 years ago.

You may wish the catalog were fatter when you hear *Shine*, which reunites her with many of the folks who contributed to *Wanderlust Diaries*, including the E Street Band's Garry Tallent, ex-Wilco drummer Ken Coomer, and producer Jansen Press. Among others lending a hand: Ben Peeler, formerly of the Mavericks; Kenny Aronoff, who is probably best known as John Mellencamp's drummer from 1980 to 1996; and Lisset Diaz, the talented vocalist from Sweet Lizzy Project.

The musicianship is first rate and so are Karlzen's vocals, which are a bit reminiscent of Juliana Hatfield but more nuanced. The songs—all by the singer—feature great hooks, a generous dose of jingle-jangle guitar, and lyrics drawn straight from the artist's life. The lilting "One Step Away from Home," for example, is about Karlzen's efforts to balance her dual lives as a musician and mother, while "Say You'll Never Go Away Again" and "I'll Be There" both concern her children.

Then there's the title cut, an effusive ballad about saying goodbye to youthful dreams and finding peace in the life that you have. Karlzen does seem to have found a measure of contentment but this song notwithstanding, one suspects she may still harbor a few dreams for her music. Given the excellence of *Shine*, they might just come true.



Mary Karlzen

Shine
Y&T Records

Back to Where it All Started For an Alternative to Traditional Country Music.

Both Mary Karlzen and her label Y&T Records are new to me; but a cursory glance at both of their bios shows they've been around a long time; and our paths should have crossed before now. The interesting part of the relationship is that Mary was one of Miami labels' Y&T's first signings in the 1990's (alongside The Mavericks!) and after Major League success on Atlantic and Dualtone; Mary has returned to home base for this; and hopefully future releases. I was still looking at the quaint cover as the first song spooled out of the office speakers; and for some reason the two don't match. I was expecting something akin to a Folk Songstress; but what we get is a good ole Friday Night Honky Tonker with scorching electric guitar and pedal-steel, while Tennessee Three bass n drums align themselves to a velvety, worldly wise set of female vocals purring out a smashing toe-tapper of a heartbreaker on Slowly Disappear. I knew that I was in for the long haul after four exquisite minutes!

The mood and pace drops quite dramatically on Track #2; One Step Away From Home, but the class still comes across in every purred word and strummed note. After four 'listens' this is one of those rare albums that will sound just as good on your home stereo as they will in the car on a hot n dusty road trip. Erring on the side of more Traditional Country Music; Try To Find, You Still Belong To Me and Something That I Missed still manage to sound as edgy and Alt. as many of today's young ladies in their check shirts, tight Levi's and cowboy boots can only dream of releasing. On the other hand; and to my ears Mary excels when she slows things down and goes into introspective singer-songwriter mode; with I'll Be There and the title track Shine having the ability to not just break your heart, but to melt the shattered parts too.

While this is most certainly a 'Country Album' in spirit and in deed; Mary Karlzen isn't afraid to take risks with her songs; which is where The Burgeoning Road and Left Alone come into play; stopping you dead in your tracks, making you listen to the words more carefully than you might have originally intended but, trust me it's well worth it. From start to finish SHINE has been a joy and a surprise in equal measures; and selecting an individual Favourite Track has been a difficult choice; although I've now narrowed it down to two rather special songs; the Twangtastic and feisty Try To Find, which conjures up memories of me first discovering Bloodshot singers Lydia Loveless and Sarah Shook.

The other is just as raucous and erudite; Dumb Game is the type of song that you will only hear fleetingly on the car radio and then miss the name of the singer; then haunting you until it comes on again a week or more later and you sssh everyone so you can hear the singers name; then when you do it's off to the Record Shop to buy the album; without stopping at Go or collecting \$200!! Although it's only April and I already have a dozen or so titles in my Top 20 albums of 2021 file; I'm damned sure SHINE by Mary Karlzen will feature in there somewhere come Christmas what a find (after all these years.) - ***The Rocking Magpie***

San Fransico Bay Area Reporter

Greg Shapiro

Women Still at Work

Singer/songwriter **Mary Karlzen** got swept up in the '90s Atlantic wave with her 1995 album *Yelling At Mary*, which was released by the label. Her output since that time has been somewhat limited, but she has returned with the radiant *Shine* (Y&T Music) album. Karlzen, who has connections to Florida and the Midwest, wears the influences of these regions on her sleeve coming up with a pleasant folksy/twangy sound that works well for her, especially on the songs "You Still Belong To Me" (a duet with Radney Foster), "The Burgeoning Road," "I'll Be There," and "Slowly Disappear," as well as rockers including "Dumb Game," "Something That I Missed" and "Say You'll Never Go Away Again."

