

BY: DANIELLE HAYDEN
PHOTOGRAPHED BY CODY JAMES

siren by the wayside

NO SONG GETS LEFT BEHIND ON FOLK
SONGSTRESS BEDOUINE'S
NEWEST ALBUM.

STYLIST: RACHEL BUNNY CHIU MAKEUP: TATIYANA ELIAS

Dress by **Toit Volant**. Bedouine's own shoes, necklace, and ring.

Bedouine's own vintage top and pants, undershirt by **Mother Denim**.



When Azniv Korkejian—better known by her moniker, Bedouine—released her self-titled debut album in 2017, the New York Times hailed her as a “future legend,” and made comparisons to Joni Mitchell. In 2019, her second LP, *Bird Songs of a Killjoy*, had *Paste Magazine* calling her a “folk magician,” and *Rolling Stone* describing her as “one of today’s most vital new folk voices.” In 2021, the singer/songwriter wowed once again, teaming up with producer Gus Seyffert (Beck, Jenny Lewis) for her latest album, *Waysides*.

Unlike Bedouine’s previous LPs, *Waysides* culls songs from deep in the past, some written up to 15 years before. They were songs that had fallen by the wayside, as it were, while she’d focused on newer tracks. When the pandemic hit, she suddenly had time to excavate them.

“It was restful at first,” Bedouine says of the 2020 shutdown, “and then it just got increasingly more daunting.” To quell her anxiety, she set up a room in her house dedicated solely to her music, intending to write a new demo. “But as soon as I got set up,” she recalls, “I started going through my computer to organize songs, and these older songs started piling up.” The familiar beckoned, in ways too strong to ignore.

“Leaving Saudi Arabia when I was younger really affected me. I was so heartbroken that in my older years, I no longer had room for attachment [to a new home].”



“I felt conflicted because I wanted to write my next record from scratch,” Bedouine says. “But I knew the further I got away from [these older songs], the less likely it would be that I released them.” She sensed she’d have to create an intentional space for the project to live, but felt sure it would take a casual form. “I thought of it as an offering to fans who were already familiar with [my work], not really as a proper album,” she considers. “But it evolved.”

Although *Waysides* is unique in Bedouine’s discography, it features the same soothing vocals and gentle acoustic guitar riffs that have always captivated fans. Also consistent are Bedouine’s contemplative lyrics, which were the engine for her songwriting process. “I would say it usually starts with a phrase, and maybe there’s a melody,” Bedouine explains. “Then it really is trying to extend a simple, short idea—even if it’s just a sentence. It’s the process of extrapolating that little capsule of a feeling.”

The album features lush storytelling. Songs like “Easy,” “I Don’t Need the Light,” and others evoke the iconic 1960s and ‘70s work of Leonard Cohen, Joan Baez, and Bobbie Gentry, giving listeners the sense they might have died and gone to Laurel Canyon. The lyrics graze familiar topics like loneliness and displacement, and though these themes aren’t new, they find an original treatment through Bedouine’s lens.

As suggested by her stage name (that of a nomadic Arabic tribe), the singer has a powerful relationship to place. And it’s no wonder, as she has moved often in her life. Born in Aleppo, Syria, she lived in Saudi Arabia until she was 10, when her family immigrated to the U.S. “Leaving Saudi Arabia when I was younger really affected me,” she remembers. “I was so heartbroken that in my older years, I no longer had room for attachment [to a new home].”

Jumpsuit by **Meo Meli**, Bedouine’s own shoes and jewelry.





Bedouine's own vintage shirt, sweater, pants, and necklace.

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That heartbreak can be traced through the trail of states Bedouine would later live in—among them Massachusetts, Texas, and Kentucky—before finally settling in Los Angeles’ Echo Park neighborhood. The theme of transience in her work seems to carry an inescapable grief, and it has impacted Bedouine’s music in the way history usually bleeds into art: unexpectedly. “It finds its way in subtly,” she says. “It’s that kind of residual feeling.”

Residual or not, a fear of attachment no longer haunts Bedouine’s work. In her latest release, it seems to have found resolution. The opening track, “The Solitude,” details how bittersweet and still life can be in the absence of a lover—how one-sided a dinner table can feel. “The whole song is about being in denial of co-dependency,” Bedouine says. It’s an evolution from the track “Solitary Daughter” on her debut album, which found her pleading to be left alone “to the books and radio snow.” The singer agrees that “The Solitude” feels like a sequel, saying it describes what happens “after you succumb to the temptations of co-dependency and let someone in to share your life.”

In recent years, Bedouine has played NPR’s Tiny Desk Concert and collaborated with indie heavy-hitters Father John Misty, Courtney Barnett, Kevin Morby, and My Morning Jacket, to name a few. She’s also started selling out shows as a headliner. But the sword of success is double-sided, and that tempers her relationship to fame.

“I think it’s really nice when [success] happens, but it’s got a very limited effect on me, and I think that’s probably something I try to be conscious of,” she reflects. “Because there’s also negative feedback, which tends to cut deeper than the positive stuff.” Staying balanced in the spotlight—or transcending it—

is essential. “When I think about it long enough, it’s unfair not to give good feedback the same attention bad feedback gets,” Bedouine admits. “But I think that’s just human nature.”

If eliciting critique in the public eye causes Bedouine distress, it hasn’t kept her from speaking her mind. While many artists choose to guard their political views from public scrutiny, Bedouine is unabashedly progressive. On social media, she offers links to sites on ethical consumerism, relief efforts in Lebanon, and democratic socialism, among others. Taking a political stance may seem to separate her from the work she does as an artist, but to Bedouine, they’re both part of a bigger picture. “Practicing self-expression feels like a really important thing, no matter what you do day-to-day, no matter what your career is,” she says.

The singer’s passion for expression has led her to pursue a wide array of interests. She’s designed art installation soundscapes, composed music for the post-apocalyptic sci-fi movie *Extinction*, starred in the psychological thriller *Knuckle Blue*, and sound-edited films like the indie rom-com *The Big Sick*—and that’s not even a quarter of her resumé. It’s dizzying.

There’s no question that Bedouine loves creating. It’s the cornerstone of her sound—that, and her connection to the past and present. (These days, she’s obsessed with the music of Bobby Charles and Jessica Pratt, two artists from completely different eras). In 2022, she’s headlining her own U.S. tour, with more dates in the works for 2023 and no plans to slow down any time soon. But even if she did leave the music scene, one thing is clear: her work has already made an indelible impact on our sonic landscape—and it won’t be soon forgotten.