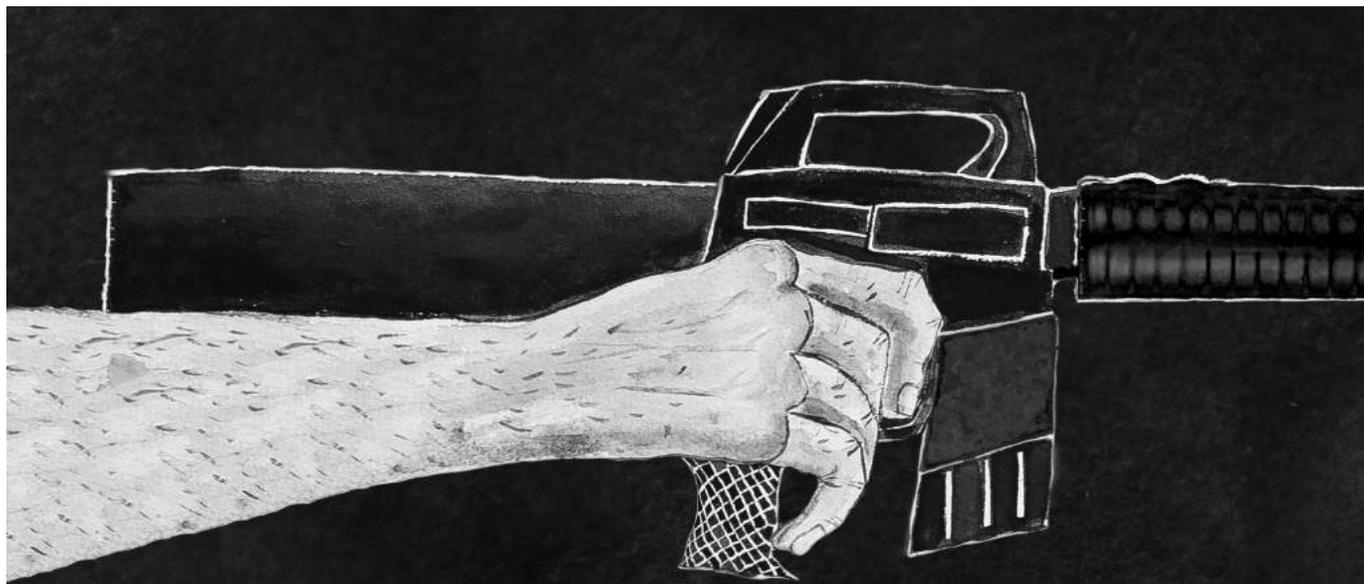


# WEEKEND



Raunchy sex comedy  
'Blockers' has a heart  
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## Soldiering on



Acclaimed singer-songwriter Mary Gauthier gives veterans and military spouses a voice and a vehicle to share their experiences on her new album, 'Rifles & Rosary Beads'

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## WEEKEND: MUSIC

# 'Truth can be transformative'

Veterans team with songwriter to share their stories of war

By NIKKI WENTLING  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON

**R**etired Marine Corps Maj. Jennifer Marino came face to face with acclaimed folk singer Mary Gauthier by chance.

At the last minute, a slot opened in a songwriting session at the veterans retreat in Bluemont, Va., where Marino volunteered. She took it, marking the start of a years-long relationship with Gauthier that would result in several co-written songs about Marino's experiences with war and coming home. Two of those songs made it onto "Rifles & Rosary Beads" (Thirty Tigers), an album Gauthier released at the beginning of the year featuring 11 songs written with — and about — veterans and military spouses.

Many of the songs address veterans' struggles to assimilate to society after service; survivors' guilt; and camaraderie among servicemembers. In others, the subjects range from sexual trauma to the sacrifices of military families.

In each song — and in each conversation with a veteran to form the lyrics — Gauthier attempted to get to the truth of their experiences and struggles, physically, emotionally and spiritually.

"I think songs, when they contain truth, can be transformative," Gauthier, 56, said. "I think that writing with people who have trauma and getting as close as we can to that experience in a song, letting the melody help us, can articulate what words alone can't get to," she said. "A song can help pave the way back home."

Marino's songs, and the others on the album, were written as part of SongwritingWith:Soldiers, which pairs professional songwriters and veterans to help them process their experiences through music. A portion of album sales goes to the nonprofit.

Before Gauthier volunteered with the program, she had a stereotype of a veteran in her mind. Marino didn't fit that preconception — neither did any of the other veterans Gauthier worked with on songs.

She believes her album has the power to share the voices of veterans not typically heard — ones that differ from Hollywood's depictions and her own.

Singer-songwriter Mary Gauthier's latest album, "Rifles & Rosary Beads," features 11 songs written with — and about — veterans and military spouses.

LAURA PARTAIN/Courtesy of All Eyes Media

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PopMatters, an international online magazine, said the album — Gauthier's 11th — “may be one of 2018's most important albums.”

“Our image of a veteran is stuck in time,” Gauthier said. “We need an update. We need a reality check here.”

### ‘Soldiering On’

The first time Gauthier and Marino collaborated in a songwriting session, the result was “Soldiering On,” the introductory song on “Rifles & Rosary Beads.”

Marino, 41, is a retired CH-46 helicopter pilot who served multiple tours in Iraq in the early 2000s. Following her retirement, she's spent much of her time working with veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder and other combat-related illnesses and injuries. “Soldiering On” was based on Marino's observations about the mission-focused drive in servicemembers that becomes a detriment when they return to civilian life.

*“You don't fight for yourself  
You fight for the ones by your side  
They do the same for you  
And to live you must be willing to die  
But what saves you in the battle  
Can kill you at home  
A soldier, soldiering on”*  
—“Soldiering On”

“It's a larger statement about the experience of a lot of veterans, who struggle to reach out because in the military they tend to be instilled with this mindset of, ‘You suck it up, drive on, do the mission,’” Marino said.

The next time they worked together was after Marino sought out Gauthier in Nashville, the musician's home. Marino wanted to write about the helicopter crash in Iraq that killed a friend, a former student and five others.

The helicopter, Morphine 1-2, was hit by insurgents and crashed Feb. 7, 2007, near Fallujah, in Anbar province. It was piloted by Marine Capt. Jennifer Harris, 28. First Lt. Jared Landaker, 25, was the co-pilot.

Three other Marines died: Sgt. James Tijerina, Cpl. Thomas Saba and Sgt. Travis Pfister. Two Navy corpsmen were killed — Petty Office First Class Gilbert Minjares Jr., and Petty Officer Third Class Manuel Ruiz.

At the time, Marino was working as a flight instructor in California. She had helped train Landaker. She had made plans to see Harris when she returned home. The flight was intended to be Harris' last in Iraq — her tour was scheduled to end the following week, Marino said.

“When they were lost, it just shook me,” she said. “I had wanted to go over there and join their squadron because I knew they were short on pilots. So there was this feeling of, ‘I wish I had been there, done something, gone in their place.’”

Marino wanted to get that feeling down on paper and into a song. The result was “Morphine 1-2,” which describes Harris and Landaker, as well as the guilt Marino felt about their deaths.

*“My head knows but my heart can't see  
It's not like it should have been me  
But I wish that I had been there on that day  
Even now, I'd take their place”*  
—“Morphine 1-2”

“By telling that personal story, I was reaching out to everyone else who struggles with that sense of loss and guilt and ‘Why did I come home and they didn't



### More about Mary

■ Mary Gauthier (pronounced go-SHAY) is an award-winning folk singer and master songwriter from Louisiana who began her career at 35 after struggling through alcohol and drug addiction and spending time in rehabilitation centers, halfway houses and jail. She got sober in 1990 and cooked at a Cajun restaurant she ran in Boston for 11 years.

■ Gauthier, who lives in Nashville, wrote the semi-autobiographical song “I Drink,” which deals with alcoholism. She describes it as her “career song” and claims it was the one that got her a record deal. It's been performed by Blake Shelton, Bill Chambers, Bobby Bare and Tim McGraw. More of her songs have been performed by Jimmy Buffett, Mike Farris, Candi Staton, Bettye LaVette and others.

■ Gauthier's first major album release was “Mercy Now” in 2005, which earned her the “New Artist of the Year” award by the Americana Music Association. The title track was named by Rolling Stone as one of the 40 saddest country songs of all time.

■ “Rifles & Rosary Beads” is Gauthier's 11th album. After widespread positive response, Gauthier said she's considering another album of songs written with veterans and military spouses. She continues to participate in workshops to help them tell their stories.

get to?” Marino said. “I also think this was my way of honoring the seven.”

### Unexpected connection

During songwriting retreats, Gauthier spent hours in conversation with veterans. Over the course of a weekend, they wrote lyrics that Gauthier paired with melodies.

In the past six months, Gauthier has taken those songs and performed them across the United States and in Canada, Ireland and the United Kingdom. She'll be in Nashville this month.

On occasion, one of her co-writers joins her onstage.

Gauthier has no military experience. She worried she wouldn't be able to connect with veterans on a deep enough level to write songs. But she was wrong.

Most people have encountered trauma and loss, Gauthier said. Those feelings are what bonded Gauthier with her co-writers, she said, and it's what makes the album relatable to people who haven't served.

“Here I am, this folk singer, openly gay, leftist in my personal politics, and I'm connecting powerfully with members of the military,” she said. “And that bridge, that connection, is a huge, huge part of what we have to do to come back together as a nation.”

“We have to mix with people we don't normally mix with, have open hearts and listen to each other.”

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## Bettye LaVette turns Dylan songs into her own

There are enough cover versions of Bob Dylan songs for a lifetime but Bettye LaVette's own dozen are a truly special kind. She doesn't simply sing them — she molds, adopts and transforms them, taking possession of the songs like few other interpreters do or can.

If Dylan has often purposely confounded expectations, LaVette's career, which began in Detroit in the early 1960s, was plagued by disruptions and did not hit a consistent stride until some 40 years after its start. But it's been highlight after highlight since 2003's comeback “A Woman Like Me,” including several Grammy nominations and a ceremony-stopping performance of The Who's “Love Reign O'er Me” when Pete Townshend and Roger Daltrey received the Kennedy Center Honors in 2008.

The repertoire of “Things Have Changed” sticks mostly to roads less traveled, leaning heavily toward Dylan songs from the 1980s onward, including “Don't Fall Apart on Me Tonight,” “Emotionally Yours” and “Ain't Talkin',” while the title track is his Oscar winner from the 2000 “Wonder Boys” soundtrack.

Producer and drummer Steve Jordan proves the ideal foil, with guitarist Larry Campbell (a former Dylan band member), keyboardist Leon Pendarvis and bassist Pino Palladino playing key roles in the transformations. Keith Richards, Ivan Neville and Trombone Shorty are among the distinguished guests.

“The Times They Are A-Changin',” the biggest hit on the album, gets a funky, swampy reading that injects the menacing track with a deep soul, while “Do Right To Me Baby (Do Unto Others),” from Zimmy's Christian phase, rocks with Led Zeppelin's intensity.

LaVette and the band take liberties with the songs — changing or dropping lyrics, altering melodies, updating moods — but the reassessments achieve their purpose: unburdened from a specific Dylan album or period, their kinship is clear and undeniable.

You could do much worse than to have Bettye LaVette interpret your songs, but you really, truly couldn't do much better.

— Pablo Gorondi  
Associated Press



### Bettye LaVette

Things Have Changed  
(Verve Records)

Photo courtesy of Universal Music Group