



Joel Benjamin

## MELISSA FERRICK

### Teaching opens creative doors for the veteran singer-songwriter

TEACHING LYRIC WRITING AT Boston's Berklee College of Music has fostered a career renaissance for folk-rocker Melissa Ferrick. "I'm surrounded by all these jazz musicians, classical composers and theater professionals," she says. "There's such an intensity—and it's a good thing. It's

made me into a happier live performer. I've been exhausted but completely fulfilled."

The academic gig came at the right time. After releasing a dozen albums with varying degrees of success, the Massachusetts native nearly quit music. "I was having a hint of bitterness about music

and wondering if I wanted to do it anymore," she says. "This reignited my desire and allowed me to discover music again."

Ferrick's new album, *The Truth Is*, examines the aftermath of a long-term relationship that came to a "crashing, horrific halt." She didn't realize the depths of her pain until the tail end of a creative dry spell. "The writing of this record was different from any other album I've made," she admits. "The breakup was a complete life-changing moment. What you're reduced to—it's scary when that happens, but very relieving." Eventually she staged an emotional recovery by applying what she learned in the classroom. "The students turned me on to music they were listening to. It gave me new energy. I saw in my head what I wanted the record to sound like."

From the first single, "Wreck Me," which features harmony vocals from friend Paula Cole, Ferrick's sound is polished but not overproduced. "This is an arranged show with a rehearsed band," she says of upcoming performances. "I've done the out-of-control and unorganized, both musically and emotionally. I understand the beauty of that. Now that I'm teaching I find myself thinking about melody and technique. The question is: 'Am I giving my audience something to sing along to?'"

Ferrick has also traded in the angry tirades of her earlier days for more mature, reflective material. "Your talent is a vessel," she muses. "I'm honoring that by making sure I've dressed it up and gotten it ready to be shown. I used to be a stream-of-consciousness writer. What interests me more now is the process. I used to live for the initial receiving, and felt like I had to create havoc and pain to write, which isn't the case."

—Blake Boldt

