Morgan Wade didn’t write to be a sensation, for critical acclaim or massive concert tours. She wrote to speak her truth, to save her own life – and perhaps throw a rope to others struggling with the weight of a world moving too fast, loves where you fall too hard and nights that, good or bad, seem to go on forever.

2021 saw *Reckless*, her Thirty Tigers/now Sony Music Nashville debut, and lead single “Wilder Days” topping critical lists from *Rolling Stone, TIME, Stereogum, New York Times, Boston Globe, FADER, Tennessean, Whiskey Riff, Billboard*, and The Boot and Taste of Country who both proclaimed, “a once-in-a-decade debut.” With a voice that is raw hurt, deep knowing and somehow innocence retained, Wade wrote or co-wrote a song cycle about the reality facing teens and 20-somethings that embraced raw desire, the reality of getting high and getting sober, the realm of crawling through the wreckage with a tough vulnerability that is as singular as the young woman from Floyd, Virginia.

“I didn’t know anybody like me when I was a kid, listening to music,” she confesses. “That’s why I fell in love with Elvis, that raw emotion. He held nothing back, and I *loved* that, so when I started writing, that’s where I went. I didn’t know you couldn’t. And to tell kids ‘do your own thing,’ that’s a bit much, but if I can show them something else? That might light a fire.”

The sinewy songwriter covered in ink understands striking that fire. Wade, shamed for singing at school, felt the singe. She recalls, “I’d spent so long being told, ‘Your voice is weird’ by other kids, and it’s such a pivotal time. They’d say, ‘What’s wrong with you? You can play for yourself but do it at home.’

“And it helps,” she knowingly concedes, “because you do it for you.”

Developing her distinctly singular – turpentine and honeycomb – vocal tone, her emotional transparency suggests Etta James, Adele, Patti Griffin, Lana Del Ray, St. Etienne’s Annie Clark, even Alison Krauss.

With insider trade *HITS* proclaiming, “Imagine Kris Kristofferson as a Gen Z woman,” *The New York Times* raving, “she sounds like she’s singing from the depths of history” and *FADER* offering, “Wade has a voice like a jagged blade, sharp enough to draw blood but lustrous under the light,” *Reckless* landed hard and true. A product of her collaboration with Sadler Vaden (guitarist in Jason Isbell + the 400 Unit) and engineer Paul Ebersold, the trio worked to keep the guitars forward, the edges rough and her voice the star in the loose tumble of players meshing on the edge of Tom Petty/Lucinda Williams’ rock & roll.

Just as importantly, Vaden – who came across Wade at a music festival, where his guitar tech asked for a CD – recognized the power of a woman being truly honest. Rather than shy away from her faltering places, self-doubt or demons, the first thing they worked on was “The Night,” a white-knuckled account of rough emotions and meaner addictions.

The straightforward lyricist explains, “Growing up in the South, people are always saying, ‘Well, you’re just having your feelings...’ But instead, you’re having a panic attack, or you’re masking something. You have to ask, ‘So, what’s causing that?’

“For so long, we try to act like ‘I’m fine, you know.’ I got sober. It’s all hunky dory,” she continues. “But it’s not. No one wants to talk about the struggle, but it happens. I wrote ‘The Night’ in an obviously dark time – and people really responded; that song means so much to so many people, I can’t tell you. But we figured since it had already been out, we didn’t need to include it on *Reckless.”*

Unprepared for the response to her debut album, the relentlessly touring artist just kept bringing her music to the people. A stouter kind of country that never sacrifices lyricism, she spent the fall on the road with Lucero, the hard-driving Memphis-based soul/rock/Americana icons.

With “Wilder Days” becoming a SiriusXM Highway Find, then hitting No. 1 on their fast-tracking country station, Wade’s song – one of *TIME*’s 10 Best of 2021 in *any* genre – opened a portal for Americana, alternative and rock fans to an artist straddling the craggy terrain across genres, but also life. Signed to Sony Music Nashville by a label head who’d grown up in bands with Kim Richey, Byron House and Bill Lloyd, the power of defying genres in the name of harder truths inspired Randy Goodman to want to bring Morgan Wade to the biggest audience possible without compromising what made her so special.

As people caught on, the reaction to songs like “The Night,” the ones *not* on the album, created a conversation about what else might not have been included in her exquisite ten song debut. With as much life lived – Wade formed her first band off Craigslist; “my friend and I drove over to this house in a pretty rough part of town, went down to the basement and found some pretty good players” – and absorbed, she was fearless in documenting her journey.

In college, studying medical sciences, she played out after a break-up, performing a song to put it all out there. Without a role model, she performed the same way she learned to sing and write: for herself, to herself. But when she gigged, something happened. People connected to her alienation, distress and seeking answers for things no one was talking about.

“I guess the songs are saying the things they can’t say,” she concedes. “I see these big guys crying. I’ve had these great big men come up to me after my shows to tell me I’m saying what everybody’s thinking.”

That drove her forward, bringing *Reckless* to fruition. The loping want-you-now reality-checking “Matchsticks and Metaphors” with its confession, “if you don’t want me, that don’t bother me at all/ don’t be upset when I don’t answer if you call...,” the stark Appalachia of “Met You” and the swirling, snapped finger compulsion beyond drugs or alcohol “Last Cigarette” captivated listeners for their white knuckled hold on reality. Like “Wilder Days” – with its j’accuse “You said you hate the smell of cigarette smoke...” hook, which *Rolling Stone* called “the year’s most irresistible country-rock chorus” – the sense of mystery allows listeners room their own lives in her songs.

“I’m not naming names,” Wade says, eyes rolling at the idea. “But I’m always for whatever paths gonna pave the way for the next outcast, the next person who feels so alone. If the songs speak to the people who need to hear them, it makes me feel good about having been so vulnerable and honest. When people scream ‘Wilder Days’ right back to me or tell me they feel like they have a story, their story in my story, that’s when you know you’re not alone.”

To that end, Wade, Vaden and Ebersold talked about what’s next. With songs left uncut, songs that expand the story, it seemed a shame to move on. “We decided we wanted to share some more. Take ‘The Night.’ In concert, people sing that back to me as loud as ‘Wilder Days,’ so there were things we wished we could change – there’s a B-3 part that got buried in the mix – and this way, we could bring back it into the story. To me, that’s what all of this is... The story of where I was, what I want and where I’m going.”

In a nod to Elvis Presley, whose “Suspicious Minds” she’s been scalding live with a portion of AC/DC’s “You Shook Me (All Night Long)” interjected, *Deluxe* contains a sizzling rendition that dials up its sexual obsession. At the other end of the spectrum, there’s “Through Your Eyes,” a chiming power-pop perspective shift on her recklessness.

“When you have younger siblings, when they say ‘I wanna be like you,’ thinking you’re so cool, *that’s* sobering,” Wade explains. “You see all of it in a very different light. You know, it’s one thing when you know you shouldn’t, and you do it anyway; it’s another when you realize a three-year-old is taking it in.”

As for Elvis, “It’s very sacred to cover one of his songs, and I wanted to choose one I could make my own. I have a lot of younger fans who don’t know, who think it’s my song, so I love that I can take something and introduce it to a new generation... but we wouldn’t have done it, just to do it.

“Vocally, it works for me; it’s got a great range, especially when I hit that chorus. I’m kind of weird about covers, but when I asked the band, ‘What do you think about this?’ They were all in.”

Between the road, the critical acclaim, the growing radio believers, Wade knows the future is coming – and intends to be ready. With one foot strongly in the realm of where she’s been, she wrote the tumbling the rollicking “When the Dirt All Settles,” with The Cadillac Three’s Jaren Johnston and “Run” – Vaden a co-writer on both tracks – to find a lighter way to escape the things that pull you down. She knows sobriety is a daily battle, that the dark moods and other issues are a fact of life. But the wide-eyed songwriter also knows how we face the day is often up to us. Rather than drowning in boredom or desperation, “Run” is a launching pad, looking both ways and finding whatever escape might be found in the company of someone outrunning their own sad memories – and the galloping running into the distance “When the Dirt All Settles.”

“It was fun, the polar opposite of what I thought [writing with someone new would be],” she says. “I’ve always written out of emotion, out of the moment, so I had it in my mind you had to be all serious all of the time. But sometimes it’s okay to kind of let go, to just have three minutes to just kick it out and have some fun. You can keep the honesty, but maybe take it from somewhere else.”

Somewhere else? For Morgan Wade, wherever that is, you can bet it’ll be wild and free and seeking.

“I figure if I keep saying the things I want to say, then people are still going to be thinking them, too. We’re all running into those feelings, so let’s just get it out in the open where we can let ‘em go.”