

Sara Bareilles

Good Grief

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When it happened, Sara Bareilles was minding her own business, walking down the street, grocery bags in hand. Suddenly, she was seized by an impulse.

“I just felt moved to start singing for Chad,” she recalls, still a bit awe-inspired even now, a few years later, by the moment the song “Just a Kid” suddenly materialized in tribute to her late friend and former tour manager Chad Joseph who had passed away from cancer several years before in 2020. “I put my grocery bags down and I picked up my phone and I started trying to catch whatever this melody was that was just arriving.”

It was the first of several of what Bareilles calls “transmissions” — a rarity for her — when songs appear unbidden and need to be plucked from the ether before they slip away.

As she began picking up the signals over the last few years she realized that the songs were coalescing around a concept and that it was finally time for a new album.

Good Grief, out August 28, marks the California native’s seventh

studio album and the first since 2019’s Grammy winning *Amidst the Chaos*, adding a new chapter to her 20-year career.

“This whole collection of songs felt like transmissions rather than a deliberate attempt to make sense of the world,” she says, something she was struggling to do. “The pandemic and the world collapsing in 2020 and what transpired after that was more than I could metabolize,” she says of a “dark mental health dip”

she experienced. “This album needed patience, so I gave it patience.”

Patience does not mean idleness, however. In the seven years between records Bareilles was busy spreading her creative gifts to multiple mediums and racking up accolades in the process.

There were the forays into television, including 3 seasons of the breathlessly funny musical comedy *Girls5Eva* on Peacock and Netflix — resulting in an Emmy nod



album artwork

for Outstanding Original Music and Lyrics — and the semi-autobiographical *Little Voice* on AppleTV+. She also returned to the Broadway stage with stints in her own Tony-nominated musical *Waitress* and as the Baker's Wife in an acclaimed revival of Stephen Sondheim's *Into the Woods* for which she received a Tony nomination for Best Actress in a Musical. Bareilles also served as one of the executive producers on the Academy Award-nominated documentary *Come See Me in the Good Light* chronicling the life of late poet Andrea Gibson. She also contributed the soundtrack song "Salt Then Sour Then Sweet" co-written by Gibson and Brandi Carlile, which is included on *Good Grief*. (There was also a wedding to longtime love, actor Joe Tippett.)

But *Good Grief*, while slow, was persistent. "The well was dry for a long time," she says. "And then I think I started to peek my head out a couple of years ago and gathering little song ideas."

As the title implies, the 14-track collection is deeply informed by loss. It comes in different varieties, some belonging to Bareilles, some borrowed in service of beautiful storytelling. Sometimes the loss is more one of equilibrium or the inability to search for silver linings in storm clouds. But as the title also implies *Good Grief* has, even at its darkest depth, a glimmering golden lifeline that runs through the album pointing toward hope on the surface.

"Thematically, it was so clear that grief was the steward of this project," the singer-songwriter says. "It hasn't been an altogether pleasant experience, but it has been so worthy an experience to learn to lose, to learn to grieve people in a big way."

In addition to Joseph and Gibson, who died in 2025, Bareilles was mourning the 2024 passing of

Gavin Creel, her *Waitress* and *Into the Woods* co-star and close friend.

"The size of the grief of that loss was awesome," she says of the desolation she transformed into the languid ballad "Forever." "I've never experienced anything like it. And there is something so humbling about those kinds of seismic changes. It's a before and after moment: I am one person before this loss and I am another person after. I would do anything to have my friend back of course. But the person who has emerged from the loss, I am grateful to have become."

Who she became is a musician willing to decry the stripping of women's rights (the defiant "Hands Off My Body") one moment and lean into vulnerability when observing the quiet melancholy that can sometimes cling to fertility procedures the next (the yearning "Ladies in a Line").

The album features several of her signature introspective piano ballads ("Say Leave") as well as some '90s-coded, pulsating, guitar-anchored numbers that pull you along with a shambolic groove ("Capsize Me") and a gentle tug ("Salt Then Sour Then Sweet") and a jazzy finger snapper about losing your marbles ("Nervous Breakdown"). Of that last, written with pal Ingrid Michaelson, Bareilles says with a laugh, "I love that juxtaposition of saying something terrible, but in a really fun, peppy way."

Bareilles wrote or co-wrote all the songs, with an assist from a few collaborators including Carlile, Gibson, Michaelson, poet Megan Falley, Aaron Dessner, and her husband Joe Tippett.

In March 2025, demos in hand, she decamped to Dreamland Recording Studios in Woodstock, NY for six days to produce the album herself with creative input from a crack band of longtime co-conspirators — drummer Charley Drayton,

guitarist Butterfly Boucher, keyboardist Misty Boyce, bass player Solomon Dorsey, multi-instrumentalist Rob Moose, and co-producer and recording engineer Jonathan Low among them. She enlisted director Josh Alexander to document the proceedings for the film *Sara Bareilles: Good Grief*, which will have its world premiere at the Tribeca Film Festival June 4.

"I was definitely inspired by being involved with the team making *Come See Me in the Good Light*, and it was really illuminating to me to be able to watch what can grow out of just observation of life," she says of how her own film ended up highlighting some very vulnerable moments for the entire group in the sessions.

"When I saw Josh's film for the first time, I thought, 'Yeah, this feels like it's like an instruction manual on how to hear this record, to understand some of where it comes from and how it was made and what goes into making something like this,'" Bareilles says of the 90 minute film. "It felt like it was a really important part of the journey to kind of teach people how to hear the music in a way."

"There were so many experiences on this record that felt mystical and ethereal, the way grief can kind of present itself," she says. "There was so much channeling in this collection of songs."

"My deepest hope," she says, "is that *Good Grief* just provides some kind of comfort or catharsis for somebody. It reminds me of making my first record *Little Voice* because everything was very handmade and hard won, every sound by every player. It's really personal and intentional. It feels like it's really close to me and my hope is that people feel closer to themselves listening to this record."

Good Grief

TRACK BY TRACK

Sara Bareilles offers insight into the inspiration behind the songs.

1. Home

“It feels like an invitation and a tone setter for the specificity and depth of this record. The inspiration was a beautiful conversation between Stephen Colbert and Anderson Cooper on Anderson’s podcast. Anderson was talking about his mom and Stephen was talking about his dad and brothers that passed away in a plane crash. I couldn’t get over the transparency of the offering. It was so radical to me that these two very public men were so willing and so generous with their grief. It was really powerful to me. It just feels really essential right now. In order for us as humans to really know and understand each other, we have to listen to each other’s stories.”

2. Just a Kid

“That was written about my friend Chad Joseph, who passed away in 2020. It was the first experience I had had with losing someone who was my contemporary, a life-long friend. We met as college kids. We were roommates. He was my first tour manager. We lived our lives side by side. And even though we had drifted in our later years, we were still very, very close friends. And that was the first time I had experienced a loss like that. It just sounds like him to me. It sounds like a little ‘90s nostalgia.”

3. Still Crying

(Co-written with Aaron Dessner)

“I was trying to wrap my arms around the redundancy and the stuckness of that feeling of, ‘How am I here again? Why am I still crying? I’m still in the same loop.’ Sometimes I like playing with a cadence or a musical style that has a kind of baked in familiarity and Roy Orbison is one of my favorites. So this is a little homage to Roy Orbison. I co-wrote this with Aaron Dessner. He is just a really gentle collaborator.”

4. A Love Story

“There are so many songs about God for me that are not explicit, but are about the relationship to the Divine, the life force, the universe, or, however people put language around it. For me, it’s a push and pull. We yearn for what we think we want and then we get given something different. And the more I can relax and surrender to the idea that I am being held by something — that Divine wisdom

— the more I enjoy the ride that I’m on. It’s a constant learning and relearning.”

5. Hands Off My Body

“I started writing that song after the ‘Woman, Life, Freedom’ movement in Iran arose surrounding Mahsa Amini. And then it was just one thing after another in the U.S.: Roe v. Wade, the Epstein files. There are just so many ways in which I feel women’s corporeal lives are inflicted upon. And I just wanted to say it explicitly.”

6. Ladies in a Line

“I’ve been on a fertility journey for the last three years, which is embedded into much of this material. I wrote that in the fertility clinic at one of my many, many mornings spent at a blood draw and watching the sea of women. Women feel mystical to me. I just am amazed by the kind of divinity of their power. Especially on this odyssey of attempting motherhood in this one kind of way, learning about the depths of that from the inside for the first time where I feel like there’s a lot there, a kind of grace and power.”

7. Heartland

“This conversation specifically around our immigrant community has been so mystifying and devastating to me. When I look at the ideals that our country is built upon, flaws and all, and the ideas that we were aiming towards, many of those hold to this day. You look at that beautiful inscription under the Statue of Liberty and you’re like, how did we get here? I was thinking about the personification of the Constitution, the Statue of Liberty. We are what we make of this place and we certainly have grave mistakes to atone for, but I’m one of those people that feels very patriotic in the sense that I love and believe that these ideals are worth fighting for. I’m not going to give up the idea that I can be proud to be an American because I am so disappointed with so much of what I see happening. Lots of good people still live here too.”

8. Capsize Me

“This was a dark moment in my mental health journey. Before I got on Lexapro, I would hit these really hard valleys. And what would happen pre-medication is that I would work really hard to get out of the valley and

feel okay and then something would sideswipe me and I would be back in that ‘Still Crying’ loop. This is about a conversation with God, which is, you carry what you carry and your back won’t break. And again, wanting it to feel musically joyful, even though I didn’t feel necessarily joyful in the place that it came from.”

9. Nervous Breakdown

(Co-written with Ingrid Michaelson)

“I love that juxtaposition of saying something terrible, but in a really fun, peppy way. I give a lot of credit to Ingrid. I got stuck on this lyric and I sent her this voice memo like, ‘Do you want to try working on this? I’m just getting stuck on this one, but I really like the idea.’ She took it across the finish line and then we slapped a little Nina Simone homage on it and we played it live. That’s just a live recording we played in the room together. It was a lot of fun.”

10. Idiot Heart

(Co-written with Joe Tippett and Megan Falley)

“It’s so unusual that this is the song that came out of our collaboration because he shares his ideas with me all the time. I was in LA at the time working on *Come See Me in the Good Light*. We were doing some press stuff, and he sent me these lyrics to a song. It was the first verse of this song and the hookiness of that phrase ‘Idiot Heart,’ it felt a little bit like a transmission. And this one felt like it might have been a little bit spurred by Andrea Gibson. Meg had shared some poetry that she had been writing about Andrea becoming moonlight and it all was a perfect storm. I reached out to Joe and asked if it was okay for me to play with it because I hadn’t heard the music he had written and he said yes. It became this really unabashed thing, a callback to that line in ‘A Love Story’ - ‘Demolish me my Maker.’ Allow yourself to be obliterated by what is beautiful and by what is painful in this life, it is all worth it.”

11. Say Leave

“This song was a transmission. It’s not my story. I don’t know where it came from. It feels like it’s a story about two women, and it was just about that extraordinary heartbreak of having to let go. And it just came out. I do a lot of writing upstate, and this is the world building that can come when you’re surrounded by so much nature and so much expanse and so much solitude. But I do love the urgency of that wanting.”

12. Salt Then Sour Then Sweet (feat. Brandi Carlile)

(Co-written with Brandi Carlile and Andrea Gibson)

“It’s a total miracle that I got to write this song with them and that I got to share it with Andrea. They loved it. And then it just became a part of the soundtrack of the launch of that film. When they started shooting that film, I don’t think it was entirely clear if Andrea would ever see it screened anywhere. So to sit next to Andrea at Sundance when we all watched it was just exhilarating. It was just this very spiritual experience. I know that Andrea would listen to that song during chemo and treatments and it just felt really sweet to have stitched together their words with Brandi’s contribution. It was just a very loving gesture towards Andrea’s love for Meg, it became an all-skate, a group number.”

13. Forever

“This is Gavin’s song. It’s written from the perspective of the person who’s leaving. The seeds for this song came in 2020. I had a friend who had a very sick mother who had made the decision to engage with Medical Aid in Dying. Her mom had a ‘death day’ and just the idea that you knew when you were going to say goodbye was just an unbearable idea to me. At that time, my friend Chad was sick, but had not passed yet. The beginnings of this song started, and then I did not finish it until Gavin was gone. It really pertains to those who have to deal with long-term illness and be in the ‘dying’ phase for a long period of time. It is an excruciating thing to have to go through, and yet there can be so much beauty and so much connection and so many gifts from that time if you can just endure the pain of it. It’s just one of the richest experiences that I’ve ever had. It became about Gavin and the kind of inextricable quality of a person who is threaded into your life.”

14. Wind is the Weather

“This was a full transmission. And that is the only time in my life that’s ever happened to me where I just pressed record and then that song wrote itself front to back. It was wild. And I was in the worst shape I have ever been in. I’m not a Buddhist, but I flirt with Buddhist principles and meditation. And I just think that is such an essential lesson of life: that the only way you will find happiness, contentment, peace is to just be with what actually is.”

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT
KRISTA WILLIAMS OR CARLA SACKS AT SACKS & CO., 212.741.1000
KRISTA@SACKSCO.COM OR CARLA@SACKSCO.COM.