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NEW ALBUM BY RENOWNED ROOTS/BLUES GUITARIST MARY FLOWER Set for National Release October 11, 2011

Mary Flower's dazzling instrumental prowess and engaging vocal style come out of the self-sufficient tradition of American blues artists who go forth armed with a guitar and a suitcase full of songs. Still, the 2008 Blues Music Award nominee for "Acoustic Artist of the Year" knows about the joys of companionship, as her new Yellow Dog Records release, *Misery Loves Company*, decisively demonstrates. *Misery Loves Company* is an album of duets — a helping of down-home hospitality that finds Mary hosting some of roots music's most accomplished players.

When it came time to record her fourth Yellow Dog record, Mary called upon some of the finest players in her home town of Portland OR, where Mary has lived since 2004. Already known for her awesome technique and interpretative skills, Mary wanted to create a record that documented a stripped-down approach she felt she could only get from working in the duet mode.

Misery Loves Company isn't a collection of down-and-out complaints, despite the title. Although Mary chose songs that describe life's struggles — the material on Misery ranges from her "Way Down in the Bottom" to Muddy Waters' "Hard Day Blues" — the result is a spirited document of some once-in-a-lifetime meetings of the minds.

On Mary's "I'm Dreaming of Your Demise," famed jazz pianist and composer **Dave Frishberg** lays down some bebop chord voicings. The Toronto-born guitarist and producer **Colin Linden** — known for his production work for Canadian singer Bruce Cockburn and for Yellow Dog artist Eden Brent on her 2010 *Ain't Got No Troubles* — adds electric dobro to "Way Down in the Bottom." Harmonica player **Curtis Salgado** — a former member of both Robert Cray's band and Santana — accompanies Mary on "Hard Day Blues."

Already celebrated as one of the leading practitioners of the challenging Piedmont blues style, Mary brings her immaculate fingerpicking to bear on *Misery Loves Company*. She is also a master of the lap steel guitar, which she plays with a blend of open strings and partial chords. It's this mastery that has made her a favorite of blues aficionados over her 35-year career. Her empathy with fellow musicians makes *Misery Loves Company* an amazing example of the art of the duet.

The record came about from Mary's long-standing desire to seek out the great players who live in Portland. She wanted to make a recording that was more intimate than her acclaimed 2005 *Bywater Dance*, which featured such players as New Orleans pianist Henry Butler and keyboardist Jon Cleary playing behind Mary in a variety of full-band settings.

Misery Loves Company revels in the company of the Portland musicians Mary chose as her duet partners. (The ringer is Linden, a Nashville resident who also mixed the record's finished performances.) "I wanted to do something stripped down, where people could hear what I'm doing," Mary says. You can hear it: the interplay between Mary and guitarist **Alan Hager** on Son House's "Death Letter Blues" is a highlight, as Mary's lap steel intertwines with Hager's stinging guitar.

In keeping with the record's in-the-moment feel, the duet with Frishberg occurred when he breezed into Portland for a few hours before leaving home for a stint in New York. "I had just gotten back from California, and we had four hours in common to do something," Mary marvels. The pairing of a blues guitarist with the composer of jazz singer Blossom Dearie's classic "My Attorney Bernie" — among other hipper-than-hip classics — produced a sardonic, salty performance.

Having twice finished in the top three at the National Fingerpicking Guitar Championship and appeared on radio programs such as A Prairie Home Companion, as well as at many folk and blues festivals, Mary has transformed material by performers as disparate as minstrel singer Emmett Miller and Rev. Gary Davis. The Indiana native has also paid tribute to her Midwestern roots by covering Hoagy Carmichael, another American original.

Misery Loves Company continues the process, with the help of the 11 duet partners Mary chose for the project. (The final song, an arrangement of Scrapper Blackwell's "Scrapper's Blues," features Mary alone.) **Johnny B. Connolly**'s button accordion flavors Elizabeth Cotten's "Shake Sugaree," while **James Mason** contributes a courtly violin part to Mary's "Miss Delta."

Mary also invited mandolinist **Brian Oberlin**, who plays on "Recession Rag," and tuba player **Mark Vehrencamp**, featured on "Jitters," another original. Bassist **Jesse Withers** (Mary's son, who anchors Northwest alt-bluegrass institution Jackstraw) adds the bottom to Tampa Red's "Boogie Woogie Dance," and there's an evocative cello part in "Devil's Punchbowl" performed by **Gideon Freudmann**. Not forgetting the human voice, Mary asked gospel singer **LaRhonda Steele** to harmonize on Rev. Gary Davis' "Goin' to Sit Down on the Banks of the River."

Each duet partner brings a fresh approach to *Misery Loves Company*, which is about the kind of joy that arises from the sort of human interaction music has always thrived upon. Mary Flower knows how to get the best out of her special guests, and brings her best game to the project as well. It's the kind of company you want to invite back to your house.

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Contact: Carl Hanni, Mod Media 520-622-6313 modmedia@theriver.com

Michael Powers 901-452-4087 publicity@yellowdogrecords.com

Photos and Electronic press kit: yellowdogrecords.com/presskits/maryflower

Mary Flower: www.maryflower.com