

“Hatred is not in my blood. Euphoria is what I feel in my dreams. Love is what I'm searching for.” Those twenty words at the start of Morgan Saint’s debut EP, *17 Hero*, form a manifesto and a map for the music that follows. Saint’s songs chronicle of emotional thrills and crashes, and they challenge preconceptions — notions of how pop can sound, how it works and what it can accomplish. Morgan Saint can turn deeply personal moments into soaring choruses, and transform ear-grabbing hooks into intimate singer-songwriter revelations.

Saint calls her music “moody pop,” and says her goal is to craft songs match indelible melodies to lyrics that deliver substance. “I want for it to be super catchy and stay in your head, but I also want to tell a story and have people relate in a way that's real and raw,” she says. “I don't want to be afraid to say things that might be a little dark or a little questionable.”

The songs of *17 Hero* are defined by luscious melodicism and bracing honesty. “Why don’t we be friends?” the chorus of “Just Friends” asks. “Why don’t we make out?” Later, over the swelling keyboards and bubbling percussion of “For God’s Sake,” Saint has different questions: “Should I just move on? Or were we brought together by fate?” It’s a cross between the directness of a text message and the disarming privacy of a diary entry.

Morgan Saint grew up on the eastern end of the North Fork of Long Island, a laid back environment known for its vineyards and farms. “I come from a very small town, but it's very beautiful out there,” she says. “And it's by the water, so a lot of times I would be at the beach.” She remembers music around her growing up. “On my mom's side, my great grandma, my grandma and my aunts are really musical. They grew up singing and harmonizing, and it was something that was prevalent. If I think back to childhood, I was playing piano, I was always singing.”

Despite eight years of piano lessons, she never quite mastered reading music. Instead, she’d invent her own music at the keyboard. “My piano teacher would go to the bathroom and then I'd be just making up songs,” she says. “I didn't even know what I was playing. She’d come back and be like, ‘How did you just do that? I've always been much better at figuring it out. Just sitting down at the piano and experimenting led to me doing that a lot.’”

Self-taught on guitar, Saint describes herself as a secretive songwriter through high school, as well as during her time at Parsons, The New School For Design, where she studied illustration and photography. “I was about to graduate college and I had been writing a lot, a lot of poetry,” she remembers. “I had been working on a thesis project, part of which was a six chapter book, and each poem was paired with a photo story. It was very tangible, something that I could hold onto forever, and I thought, ‘I want to do that with some of the music I’ve been writing.’ ”

She knew producer and singer-songwriter Cass Dillon through the weekend gigs she would sometimes play on Long Island, and sent him a song she’d made a recording of with her phone. “I wanted a proper recording and produced version of one of the songs that I had written,” she says. But once she began the process in June of 2016, she wanted more. “I loved it,” she says. “I wanted to be in the studio 24-7. Every day I was like, ‘Let’s keep going — another song!’ We sort of didn’t stop.”

Starting with the idea of making a five-song EP, Saint and Dillon completed more than a dozen tracks. The sound they found combines wide open melodies and hooks with tracks that aren’t afraid of edge, a balance of pop ambition and individual expression that lets Saint’s vocals shine through.

The five songs of *17 Hero* track a process of self-discovery, in which Saint herself has become the sort of artist she says she gravitated toward when she was growing up. “During my dark times in high school, I always turned to music,” she says. “One thing that helped me a lot was just seeing artists who aren’t afraid to be themselves. I’ve always been a little bit shy. I never feel like it’s important to speak unless I have something important to say. And I want at this point to share my stories with the world.”