

MUNA

It was one night in the fall of 2013 when USC classmates Katie Gavin (23 years old), Josette Maskin (22 years old), and Naomi McPherson (23 years old) were hanging out in the dorms and began playing music together for the first time. With Maskin and McPherson on guitar and Gavin on her MIDI keyboard, the trio wrote what would become the first song from the band they'd later name MUNA. After recording a sketch of the song, Gavin worked her Ableton magic to bring the track to its full synth-pop glory, crafting an emotionally raw but resplendently layered sound that is still at the heart of MUNA's music today.

Now set to release their debut EP on RCA records, MUNA continue to record their vocals and guitar parts in their bedrooms and self-produce all of their music. Apart from enlisting the mixing duties of Dan Grech-Marguerat (Lana Del Rey, Wolf Alice, Radiohead), the band created the EP on their own, with McPherson and Gavin heading up its production.

While that D.I.Y. ethic has endured since the birth of the band, the past few years have seen MUNA morph from a loosely experimental project to a guitar-driven dark-pop trio who clearly know their way around a hook. Josette recalls creating their first song, "Feel Better", "I remember being so shocked at how pop it was and Katie said something like, 'I love pop, bitch!' and walked away." With a sophisticated sense of melody and shoegaze-inspired affinity for lavish atmospherics, the band creates pop that's both intricately composed and built on complicated emotion.

On their anthemic first single “Loudspeaker,” for instance, MUNA reflect on overcoming fear and reclaiming power. “It’s essentially about someone who’s experienced intimidation or abuse and who’s trying to get through that and keep on living,” says Gavin. “The lyrics are centered around the idea of self-love, and how part of that is being able to express yourself and own your narrative by saying, ‘I don’t really care how this affects you, I have to do what’s healthy for me.’” True to MUNA’s refined sensibilities, “Loudspeaker” turns that potentially weighty material into pop perfection, merging its pounding beat and shimmering guitar tones with brilliantly piercing lyrics.

With Maskin playing lead guitar and McPherson handling rhythm guitar and production (as well as designing the band’s artwork), MUNA bring a similarly rich complexity to each track on their debut EP. Hailed as a “crystallised gem of electronic pop” by *The Fader*, “Promise” pairs its dreamy harmonies and cascading guitar work with lyrics that unflinchingly look at issues of anger. “I come from a family where we all struggle with our temper, and this is a song about the two sides of that,” says Gavin. “It’s about being inside that thought cycle and unwilling to back down and feeling almost high off of it, and then coming down from that high and not knowing how to forgive yourself, feeling like you’ve caused too much damage.”

On “Winterbreak,” with its bright synths and hazy melody, Gavin’s soulful vocals achingly capture the subtleties in human connection. “I wrote it when I was home from school a few years ago and dealing with that feeling of realizing you’ve become the foreign agent in a place where you used to belong,” says Gavin. “It’s about seeking out somebody who used to be a source of comfort and still feeling that magnetism but recognizing there’s an undeniable difference now, and all the isolation that comes from that.” And on “So Special,” MUNA offer what the band calls “an

anthem for the slut-shamed girls of the world who have to assert their own value until they believe in it again.”

“So Special” marked a turning point for the band, notes McPherson. “Katie and I had been working on the track for what felt like months, and during that time we decided to dedicate ourselves to making our music as polished as the music we love,” she says. “We wanted to give ourselves the challenge of making really good pop songs.”

After that first session in fall 2013, the three musicians kept playing and writing together and soon began calling themselves MUNA (“We wanted something feminine,” says McPherson, explaining that the name is a play on the words *moon* and *lunar*). MUNA devoted the following year to shaping their sound and playing parties and warehouse shows, then spent Summer 2014 in Brooklyn’s Crown Heights, where they sculpted a whole new batch of songs.

Now at work on their full-length debut, MUNA remain focused on creating music that’s intensely honest. “After we came up with ‘So Special,’ our mindset really changed,” says Maskin. “It became about something bigger than us.” Referring to pop as “a very egalitarian genre” (in McPherson’s words), MUNA ultimately aim to offer a sense of release and renewal in their songs. “I’m fucking sentimental and I really do believe in the power of music,” says Gavin. “It feels like a big gift for me to be able to sing a song that might help someone who’s dealing with guilt or shame, or any of those feelings we carry around with us. We want our songs to help them get rid of all that and just jump around a while.”