

The most punk thing you can do is tell the truth, and for MUNA the truth needed to be found. It's not a quick exercise. It takes time; more than two years. If you're as resourceful and intentioned as Katie Gavin, Naomi McPherson and Josette Maskin are, you're not going to lay dormant waiting for answers to reveal themselves. You're going to pursue them, and it's going to be difficult. Sometimes you're not going to have a clue what you're even looking for and the whole might not reveal itself until much later down the line. Six months after they finished touring their 2017 debut album 'About U', the trio found themselves back in LA at an emotional rock bottom. It was quiet. The cheers of adoring crowds were but far-off echoes in the distant past, and with every new day they drifted further from the life they had come to know – the life of a touring band. It was in that moment of loss of purpose and validation that lead songwriter Gavin came up with a song unlike anything she'd written for MUNA before. It was self-aware, yes; a little self-critical, sure; but it was also a positive affirmation to herself. And it was laced with humor. It's called: 'Number One Fan'.

“*So I heard the bad news,”* it begins. *“Nobody likes me and I'm gonna die alone in my bedroom, looking at strangers on my telephone…”*and the sound of a dead dial tone follows. Immediately you will smile. You might even laugh. That's the point. By the time the chorus comes in you'll be wondering where this MUNA song came from, not just lyrically but sonically. It's beyond playful; comprised of crazy pop bells and whistles, jumping synths as kitschy as Madonna's 'Material Girl' and the same healthy dose of WTF as many of your favorite '90s one-hit-wonders. *“Oh my god!”*comes the chorus. *“I'm your number one fan?!”*It's as much a surprise to the listener, as it is to them. It is also truly meta. A little tongue-in-cheek but deftly serious at the same time because loving yourself is not a joke.

“It was written well into the withdrawal,” explains Gavin thinking back to early 2018. “Our fans weren't available to scream at us and tell us 'you're doing amazing sweetie'.” It was also six months into the process of writing the follow-up record to their debut – an LP that wasn't just critically lauded, but one which made all their wildest dreams come true. 'About U' turned their once college dorm band into a fully-fledged career prospect. MUNA finished their first album cycle as the opening act for [Harry Styles](x-apple-data-detectors://1). They played their last gig of a North American and European tour in Italy. The comedown from that was severe. It affected all three of them in different ways.

“I was struggling being on my own,” says Gavin. “I had also made a choice to take time off relationships after a series of failures. I needed to really be with myself.” 'Number One Fan' emerged just as she was experiencing the first glimmers of admirable acts of self-care. The narrative is one of self-championing and self-sufficiency. “And talking back to the negative voices in my head,” she says. “Having it in song form held me accountable to the path that I was on. I have to make a commitment to self-betterment if I'm going to put this in a song. Because I really care about embodying what I'm singing about.”

The craziest thing about 'Number One Fan' is that the song then became a totem for McPherson and Maskin, and therefore MUNA at large. MUNA's respective producer and guitarist were living together separately from Gavin, and experiencing a transitionary period of their own. The song's purpose wasn't immediately apparent to them. Its departure from MUNA's original iteration as a “dark pop” synth band writing mainly from a place of pain, opened up their entire world to endless opportunities both lyrically and musically. “It was a freeing experience,” says McPherson. “That song desperately wanted to be a club electro banger. We had to let it be that. Then we realized after that we can just do whatever we want. We can make songs that sound completely different from each other. We can make a record with a bunch of different stories. The whole process has been about us learning not to stand in our own way and we've each had a spiritual journey trying to figure out what kind of people we wanna be.”

While Gavin was in her own deep mode of self-discovery, McPherson and Maskin were grappling with pride, defensiveness and a belated imposter syndrome surrounding their places in a successful band. What's arisen from this period is a coming-of-age record in which all three in separate ways were battling with their own inner self-delusions. By becoming more intimately open with one another they came through the other side. “You have a choice,” says Maskin. “What are you going to do with your life? What kind of person are you gonna be? Are you gonna be an active participant or are you gonna be passive? Making a second record has made us really engage with each other and ourselves in new ways that I didn't know were possible.”

After months of writing, it took forging a new relationship with co-producer [Mike Crossey](x-apple-data-detectors://2)[[Wolf Alice](x-apple-data-detectors://3), [The 1975](x-apple-data-detectors://4)] and working in a big studio for the first time, to surpass their biggest hurdles. They worked themselves to breaking point. Gavin remarks on how “brave” her bandmates have been in terms of their disposition to stretch themselves in pursuit of becoming the greatest band they can be. “They really let go of their egos and explored all the possibilities of a song to support my voice. They've shown again and again a willingness to be a vessel for the message and to take it all the way to its limit.” Hence a record that takes the cohesive foundation of 'About U' and blows it into another dimension: from the country-inspired 'Taken' to the Robyn-aping 'Never'; the autotune tear-inducing confessional of 'It's Gonna Be Okay, Baby' to 'Navy Blue', which could have been on the original soundtrack to The OC. There are absolutely no rules with this LP other than making the songs the best they can possibly be.

When it came to finally naming the album, the grandiose concept jumped out. “Saves The World” might sound like a facetious statement about the power of pop, but it's an earnest reflection on the band's own survival. They rallied for it together with blind faith and the confidence to accept yourself no matter what's around the bend. “It's about saving yourself,” says Gavin of the title. “If you're committed to saving yourself you *are*saving the world.” And, you know, it's a little messianic too. “When people take responsibility for their own stories and accept that they are capable of being their own heroes the whole world could shift in a crazy way.”

The band who were once renowned for wearing 'FUCK TRUMP' t-shirts onstage, and for stapling the personal to the political, are still here to fight but they're coming to the battleground from a place of triumph. Where 'About U' addressed a collective “you”, 'Saves The World' inverts that gaze towards a band who remain queer and radical but also in need of a good lifting of spirits. The songs contained are intended to be useful tools to those who need a soundtrack from which to garner energy to strive. They're bringing a new look too; softer around the edges and more mature. "I guess I could say, we've laid down our weapons?!” jokes Gavin who has never presented herself as a perfect prophet. “The songs are an honest depiction of times that I've failed, my own pitfalls and experiences of choosing to relive the same painful story, rather than choosing to grow.”

This time around MUNA are speaking growth into existence. “If anything it now makes it that we kind of don't have a choice but to practice what we are preaching,” says Maskin. “Or try to – very hard,” adds Gavin. After 'About U', MUNA have all gone through a cycle of death and rebirth, they've rebuilt their confidence in themselves as musicians, as a band and as the bestest of friends. “We're stretching ourselves as wide as we can to become as big and encompassing as we can be,” says Maskin. “We are here to take up the space that we deserve.”