****

When Sasha Sloan was 10 years old, she wrote her first song. “Pitter Patter,” she says, “is literally the worst song anyone’s ever written in their entire life.” But “Pitter Patter,” which her mother convinced her to perform at a local talent show months later, sparked something in Sasha. “That’s when I really fell in love with writing, because you can’t be mean to a 10-year-old performing an original song,” she says with a laugh. “It gave me the confidence I needed.”

Years later, after leaving her hometown of Boston for Los Angeles to fulfill a songwriting deal, reality sank in. “I was like, ‘Holy shit. I’m 19. I can’t even buy myself a drink. I don’t know a single soul here—and I have no money.’” She buried herself in her work, taking “horrible” sessions for the first few years as she juggled a grabbag of temp jobs, which included stints at the Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf and an ill-fated three-day gig pasting promotional peel-off stickers onto thousands of Red Bull cans by hand. Those hustling years toughened her up. Thrown into L.A.’s songwriting bootcamp system, she quickly learned what worked for her, and what didn’t. “Every song that got rejected made me a better writer,” she says. “I grew up super fast. I learned how to be alone. And I got to inadvertently figure out what kind of artist *I* wanted to be by watching other people do it.”

Those early days of trial and error led to Sasha releasing three EPs—*sad girl*, *Loser*, and last fall’s *Self Portrait*—after signing with RCA as an artist. “With those EPs and the songwriting I was doing, I learned that if you don’t know who you are as an artist, you’re gonna get overlooked,” she says. “I learned the value in sticking to my gut and knowing what I want to say and who I want to be. I learned about being patient, and about not trying to be like every other artist on New Music Friday.” As songs like “Dancing With Your Ghost” and “Older” began deeply connecting with millions of listeners globally, she began to believe in herself and trust her gut. Touring those same EPs helped her begin writing her debut album, too: “I wanted to create a world where, when I toured it, I would just have to stand or sway there. When I was writing, I went, ‘Fuck it, I’m done trying to dance, I’m done trying to move. I’m just gonna stand there and sing these songs like Adele does.’”

Sasha calls touring and her EPs the building blocks of *Only Child*, a stunning and confident debut album that delivers on the promise of her early work. It’s bold, it’s confessional, it’s funny, it’s real, and it’s everything you’d expect from an artist who’s built her career on being the most no-holds-barred songwriter in the game. *Only Child* paints a cohesive, multifaceted picture of its 25-year-old creator because *Only Child* is one of the most cohesive pop albums in recent memory, a byproduct of her desire to make a body of work rather than a playlist. “As a kid, when I put a CD in, I listened to the whole album,” she says. “I didn’t listen to a Coldplay song and then a Britney Spears song and then a P!nk song. With this album, I wanted to release music that’s authentic and true to me: a lot of cynicism, very jaded, atheist, and sarcastic. I’ve realized it’s ok to incorporate that all into my music. In the past, there’ve been songs on my EPs that I’ve been 90% sure about. That’s just something I didn’t allow myself to do on this album.”

Standout songs like “High School Me” (written with Nashville songwriter extraordinaire Shane McAnally) and “House With No Mirrors” find Sasha profoundly turning her gaze upon herself, unpacking the insecurities that she admits have ruined countless nights. The album’s evocative title track presupposes what life will one day be like without a sibling to help her as her parents grow older, while *Only Child*’s closer, “Santa’s Real,” waxes wistfully for childhood fantasies unrealized in the face of the world’s coldest truths. “Every song on this album, I love, and they make me feel something,” she says. “That was my rule of thumb.”

*Only Child* deals in love both lost and found. “Is It Just Me” (“my first *and* last Zoom writing session,” she says) unspools a mixture of both lighthearted and polarizing opinions (“People my age make me nauseous”... “I don’t think love lasts forever”), while “Hypochondriac” reflects on reckless, youthful habits she sidelined when she found her match. “Lie” ping pongs from the perspective of an ex-boyfriend to Sasha’s own point-of-view as she unpacks the denial and fallout of their failed relationship. “I don’t believe in fairytale endings,” she says. “I still believe in love. I’m in a very serious committed relationship. But people change. Things change. I think friendship lasts forever. The love part comes and goes.”

On *Only Child*, Sasha Sloan finally steps into her own as one of music’s most gifted lyricsts and a profoundly affecting artist. It’s the type of record most artists never get to make, equal parts arresting and affecting.“This album is a very mature version of me,” Sasha adds. “It’s the most honest I’ve been. And there’s even a twinge of hope in there, which is new for me!”