

An outlet for emotion

Hazel Drew '23 tells the story of her junior year through her EP, *Beginning To Blur*

STORY Char Perry
PHOTO Grace Finke

For Hazel Drew '23, the best part of writing and releasing her own music is the joy of listening to her track for the first time. Yet the final product is far from Drew's only motivation; the songwriting process itself is a way for her to express her emotions.

In her soon-to-be-released song, "Under The Sun," Drew channeled her passion for songwriting to articulate her anger at the music industry for idealizing trauma.

"[Music labels are] convincing [kids] that their worth lies in how much they're suffering [and] they need a lover to fix it," Drew said.

Drew also expands on topics such as her identity and sexual harassment in her music, creating a powerful message through her art.

Drew's first song, "Evolve," was released on May 6, 2022. "Inner Self" followed on May 27, and "Not Yours" was released on Aug. 2. Those three songs, along with the upcoming two "Mylimasis"

and "Under The Sun," will be combined into Drew's first EP (extended play), *Beginning to Blur*.

The songs cover topics ranging from first love to problems with the world. "Evolve" and "Mylimasis" focus on crushes and romance, while "Inner Self" is about the social anxiety Drew faces as a teenager in adult-dominated spaces. "Not Yours" details Drew's anger at catcalls and harassment, and "Under The Sun" centers on the damage done by music that glorifies inner pain.

Drew described her EP as "a time capsule for [her] 11th grade year."

However, Drew's love for songwriting began far before her junior year of high school. For Drew, songwriting has always been a way to process and express herself. Drew first started writing music at the age of 12, following an emotional disagreement with her mother.

"I wanted to make it up to her, so I wrote a song...this really helped me vent [and] come to terms with my emotions, [so] I kept doing it," Drew said.

Other people and real-life scenarios continue to inspire her songwriting—



BEGINNING TO BLUR The cover for Drew's upcoming EP, designed by Grace Finke '23

"Mylimasis" is a love song written for Drew's partner. In all scenarios, Drew sees songwriting as a way to "be honest with [herself.]"

"Writing is about admitting things that are really difficult for me to say to others and [about] confronting my own issues," Drew said. "It's how I clear the air with

other people, [for] myself."

Beginning To Blur will be released in late October or early November. After its release, Drew plans to release a second EP that she described as "less singer-songwriter, more indie pop-rock."

Traumazine is Megan Thee Stallion's renaissance

The lauded rapper behind "Body" and "Hot Girl Summer" is at it again—leaving no heavy topics uncharted

STORY Gabriel Hawkins
PHOTO Megan Thee Stallion

Rarely does an album emerge that transcends time and convention. When albums are released, they are often tailored for a specific period in the artist's life, a reference point that is exhausted alarmingly quickly due to over-saturation (Think, Adele's 30 or Cardi B's *Invasion of Privacy*). But not Megan Thee Stallion's most recent—and authentic—album to date, *Traumazine*.

Released on Aug. 12, 2022, *Traumazine* fearlessly delves into Megan's storied past and uncovers her long withheld insecurities. Megan's unsparing coverage of her various struggles—her mental health, the societal expectations of black women, discrimination in the music industry, and personal anecdotes about her late mother—are just a few of the powerful ingredients in her most ambitious album so far.

It's only apt that an album that presents such hefty topics would mark a point of differentiation for its songwriter—a personal artistic renaissance in which the rapper's creative potential becomes fully realized.

Traumazine serves as a triumphant revamping of

Megan's artistic image, where she shifts away from empowering themes and tackles more extensive societal issues. In her lyrics, which serve as a dynamic coalescence of raw musings and hot-takes, she solidifies herself as not just a rapper, but an artist with powerful command over her music.

In previous albums, Megan skirted around political issues, focusing instead on ideas of personal empowerment and sexual liberation. *Traumazine* takes an entirely different route.

In track 3, titled "Not Nice," Megan raps about the armor she has created in her public and private personas to be taken seriously. Boldly, she raps, "My skin not light enough / My dialect not white

"In 'Anxiety,' the album's eleventh track, Megan comes clean about her struggles with mental health which may have been masked by the ease and confidence radiated through lyrics in her previous albums... Megan raps about not knowing how to seek help."

enough." She continues detailing the colorism and objectification she's withstood in various arenas as the song progresses, underlined by her titular rap "I'm not nice / I'm the sh*t."

In "Anxiety," the album's eleventh track, Megan comes clean about her struggles with mental health which may have been masked by the ease and confidence radiated through lyrics in her previous albums. With raw grit, Megan raps about not knowing how to seek help. "They keep saying 'I should get help / But I don't even know what I need / They keep saying' speak your truth / And at the same time say they don't believe."

The chorus of "Anxiety" takes on an optimistic quality, destigmatizing the concept of anxiety as a whole

and speaking to the ubiquity of an emotion that renders so many isolated. She raps about having frequent "bad days," but having the ability to "bounce back", like a "bad b*tch." Through "Anxiety," Megan works masterfully at the intersection of vulnerability and empowerment, acknowledging her struggles while pledging to her resilience and tenacity.

The album's twelfth track, "Flip, Flop," echoes these sentiments in a seamless transition from "Anxiety." Megan begins the song dishing about her mother and her feelings of isolation: "Behind this smile, I'm fightin' these tears 'Cause a b*tch be sad as f*ck (yeah) / Ever since my mama died, 2019 I don't really know who I can trust." The bulk of "Flip Flop" seems to build upon the lyrics of "Anxiety," detailing the traumatic events that have shaped her as a person and artist.

While lyrics in *Traumazine* occasionally have a propensity toward repetition, the issue is remedied by Megan's easy-to-dance-to-beats and eclectic backing tracks. As the heaviness of the first four tracks begins to reach a breaking point, Megan swoops in with a lighthearted and bubbly club track.

The album's fifth and most playful track, "Her," is underscored by a jubilant club beat that is admittedly impossible not to dance to. The song is devoid of depth or trauma-filled insight—the most welcome and wholesome respite in an album that leaves its unbandaged scars scattered about every other track. It creates a dynamic contrast, a radical dissonance; Megan juggles her agony in addition to her triumph.

For any other artist, meshing this level of sensitivity and triumphant boldness into 17 bite-sized tracks ("Sweetest Pie," which was released on March 11 in collaboration with Dua Lipa, is a bonus track) would be somewhat of a daunting undertaking. But Megan Thee Stallion has proven herself. *Traumazine* is bold, defiant, searching, unapologetic, and shocking in all the right ways. Moreover, it represents a refreshing turning point in Megan's evolution as an artist, and it's a thrill to be along for the ride.

