

RAVYN LENAË



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RAVYN LENAЕ ♡

It's hard to believe that someone so young could be bursting with so much talent; but listen to Ravyn Lenae and you'll quickly realize that age is truly just a number. At 17 years old, the classically trained singer/songwriter is taking the music world by storm with her inimitable style, which seamlessly melds elements of R&B, Electronic, Soul and Hip-Hop. As Pitchfork declared, "She roars. She soars. She has the right."

Born and raised on Chicago's often turbulent south side, Lenae is part of "Zero Fatigue," a local music collective that boasts artists like Smino and Jean Deaux, as well as producer, Monte Booker. In early 2015, Lenae released her single, "Greetings," which quickly became a household favorite in the Chicago area and beyond. Soon after, she signed with renowned Chicago-based record label, Three Twenty Three Music Group.

In August of 2015, Lenae released her highly acclaimed debut EP, Moon Shoes, which premiered on Fake Shore Drive and My Mixtapes and has well over two million plays on SoundCloud. Hypetrak appropriately described the EP as a "combination of entrancing vocals, control over creative cadences and superb writing, and noted that Lenae demonstrates an "incredible collection of skills that many singers work a lifetime on perfecting." After the success of Moon Shoes, Lenae was named Verizon's Big Break Artist on WGCI in Chicago, as well as one of BBC Radio's New Names of 2016. To date, Lenae has performed all over the country, including headlining appearances at Chicago's African Fest and at House of Blues Chicago.

Given her remarkable ability to blend genres, it's no surprise that Lenae has been influenced by a wide variety of artists, from Stereolab and Outkast to Bob Marley and Ella Fitzgerald. "I tend to take small bits and pieces from my favorite artist, and incorporate them into my own work," shares Lenae. And, maybe that's why some of her favorites - like Erykah Badu and NAS - are now reaching out as dedicated fans of Lenae.

With a lifetime ahead of her, fans can look forward to a whole lot more from Ravyn Lenae. "*I plan to touch as many people with my music as I possibly can,*" says Lenae. "*And, I can't wait to learn more about the world and about myself. I know I still have to tap into my full potential, and discover the true Ravyn Lenae.*"



RAVYN LENA



II. Press Highlights



March 15, 2017

10 New Artists You Need to Know: March 2017

Once again, we talked to 10 of the hottest artists who are climbing the charts, breaking the Internet or just dominating our office stereos. This month: a still-faceless R&B mystery, a Los Angeles jazz shredder and the most Shazam-ed band in America.



Sounds Like: A young woman finding her voice amidst sounds and colors

For Fans of: Solange, Jhené Aiko circa *Sailing Souls*, Kelela

Why You Should Pay Attention: Ravyn Lenae is a high school senior – she graduates from the Chicago High School for the Arts this summer – who crafts thoughtful and highly lyrical electronic soul. On her 2015 debut *Moon Shoes*, reissued by Atlantic Records last year, she sings about life as a dreamy, sometimes-melancholy teenager in a softly assertive voice. Her just-released follow-up, the appropriately titled *Midnight Moonlight*, delves into more romantic concerns with the same quiet grace. From January to March, the 18-year-old toured across the country with hotly tipped rapper Noname. "Before I left, we had put together an academic plan for me where I would basically be doing school online," she says. "I thought it would be much easier juggling tour and school. But there's literally no time to even sleep." Born and raised on the South Side of Chicago, Lenae knew she wanted to pursue

music at an early age. She sang in church and studied guitar and piano before she linked up with producer Monte Booker, who helped assemble her two EPs. "Honestly, I didn't know it was a project," she says of *Moon Shoes*. "I wasn't creating with an intention, I was creating solely for releasing my emotions and being creative."

She Says: Lenae likes to connect colors with emotions. "I'm a very colorful person," she says. When asked to describe the difference between *Moon Shoes* and *Midnight in the Moonlight*, she explains, "*Moon Shoes* is very pink and yellow, and maybe orange, very bright, whereas *Midnight Moonlight* is purple and blue and, I don't know, gray. Not to say those colors are sad, because a lot of times people like to equate those colors with sadness, or [being] blue. But those colors are more emotion-felt, and deep, and sultry."

Hear for Yourself: In the short but evocative "Alive," Ravyn Lenae breaks free of a romantic attachment with no regrets.



NYLON

February 15, 2017

Ravyn Lenae Doesn't Want To Be A Star

Because she's reaching for the moon



In celebration of Black History Month, NYLON is running a spotlight series called UNAPOLOGETIC. Every day, we'll celebrate different aspects of black culture through profiles, interviews, roundtables, reviews, videos, and op-eds. #Blacklivesmatter and we hold that truth to be self-evident.

Even before you notice her head of bright red hair, the first thing that will strike you about Ravyn Lenae is her vibrant energy. The 18-year-old, who is from the South Side of Chicago and has a vocal range that will blow you away, seemingly infuses the air around her with positive vibes.

The day we met followed Lenae's first-ever performance in New York City on the bill of Pigeons & Planes' No Ceilings showcase. When she graces the stage, Lenae embodies the essence of an entertainer; accompanying her arresting voice is a crowd-captivating blast of pure-hearted charisma, exposing a personality as colorful as the clothes she wears.

When we get together for our interview, Lenae is wearing an oversized black-colored shirt and red patterned pants with a pink beret, multicolored barrettes, red glasses, and yellow pom-pom earrings. Her outfits are determined by her mood, she tells me, but almost always consist of multiple pops of color.

"I like color, so a lot of times I pick colors that kind of resonate with me that day," she says. "Today, I'm feeling very, very bright. That's why I have all this color on... I feel like our clothes get so boring as we get older. Like, what happened to polka dots and patterns? Why do you have to be boring when you get older?"

Lenae definitely doesn't have to worry about getting old and boring for awhile—she hasn't even graduated from high school, though she's already a full-time artist. Last year, she released her debut

EP *Moon Shoes*. She's already collaborated with other notable creatives like Noname, Mick Jenkins, Saba, Su Na, and Monte Booker.

Lenae is expected to release her *Midnight Moonlight* EP sometime soon. In the meantime, get to know more about this teen who is too cool for school in the interview, below.

How early did you develop an interest in music?

From the beginning, I always felt artistically inclined. I always knew I wanted to be an artist of some sort even if I didn't know what an artist was. I clung to the arts. I always watched *High School Musical* and those type of things. I guess it all started when my grandmother got me a guitar for my 10th birthday, and I started taking lessons from there. As a smaller kid, I was just really flip-floppy. I'd do something one day, and then I'd be like, "Ah, I don't want to do it anymore" the next day. So I quit guitar and I started taking piano lessons. My piano teacher at the time asked me to compose a piece, and before then I had never written or sang or anything. That was a real challenge for me, but I'm glad he made me do that because I didn't know that I was into singing. After doing that piece, I thought, *Okay, I think I like singing a little bit more than this. Yeah, the piano's a little lame. Let me do singing.* So my grandma enrolled me in vocal lessons, and from there I just fell in love.

Nothing gave me that satisfaction of being on stage and seeing everyone's expression and them crying; it's very heavy. People believe in you. So that kind of gave me that push. Coming out of middle school, I knew that I wanted to make music a career, so my mom and I looked for art schools in Chicago, which there weren't many. It's crazy [because] Chicago is an art city, you know? I decided to go to Chicago High School for the Arts which is in Humboldt Park. I'm a singer now, I've been trained classically, taken acting lessons, music technology; I'm a well-rounded artist, I feel, and I owe it to [school]. So coming out, I feel like I want to take everything [the school] gave me and apply it to who I am as an artist today and go out in the world and basically spill my puzzle pieces.

Can you tell me more about the *Midnight Moonlight* EP?

Before I even named it I was listening to the songs, and every time I listened to them, it would always be at night. I would just picture myself sitting on a hill and staring at the moon. So that's where I got the idea for *Midnight Moonlight* 'cause it would always be around midnight, and I just feel very connected to the moon. My first project was called *Moon Shoes*. Maybe I'll get off the moon after this one... maybe. I think it's tired of me. So yeah, with this one, I wanted it to be smoother. When you're listening to music late like that, you're not really listening to turn-up music. For me at least, I like to relax and listen to subtle music or dreamy music. So I think this project differs from my first project in that way. The first one was a little more upbeat and fun, whereas this one is more relaxed and poised.

How did you decide on this hair color?

Okay, I'm gonna be honest. I have a scarf that I wear, and back then it used to be red. I would be in the mirror, getting ready for bed, and I'd be like, "Wait. This color's kind of cute." So I kind of pictured the scarf as my hair and my beautician—we're really close—and I was talking about it for a little while. I had a rinse when I was in seventh grade, and for eighth-grade graduation, I got red highlights, and then freshman year, I just dyed my whole head, so it's been red ever since. My grandma told me that she felt that the red hair fits me more than my actual hair color because it's brighter and more lively. My natural hair color is, like, a dusty brown; it's kind of boring. Maybe I'll change it [one day], but I think everybody would be upset. You can never go wrong with a wig, though, so I might do a wig at some point.

Can you tell me about your tattoos?

My first tattoo is a French proverb, and it says, "Dream your life, live your dreams." This was around the time where I decided I didn't want to go to college and I just felt like I needed that push, so I got it tattooed on me. That's a really scary decision, and a lot of people are college-oriented at my school, so it's really challenging when everyone else is going to college and applying and they're like, "What are you doing?" You can't really say, "Oh, I'm doing this and this and that," where really, I'm just taking it day by day. The artist life is very spontaneous, and I can't say where I'm gonna be next month or in the month after. A lot of people like structure, so there's definitely a risk with being an artist that a lot of people aren't really willing to take. For a long time, I was questioning myself and doubting that, but I feel like the stars are aligning for me and I need to jump on them. I got [my other tattoo in] September, I think, and it's just a cherry blossom with a raven on it. I think that cherry blossoms are very delicate and soft and elegant while a raven is very daring and bold and wise. I think that it's a great contrast [representative of] me as a person. And, I have another tattoo that's just the Aquarius symbol.

I'm actually getting another one. Have you ever heard of a saying, "As above, so below, as within, so without"? It kind of stemmed from that. I want to have two feminine hands and then little puppet strings holding stars and moons and suns, basically saying that I'm in control of my universe and how I go about life. Let's say you wake up and you think to yourself, *Today is gonna be a good day*. It'll be a good day simply because you put that in the atmosphere. You're in control of how you respond to certain situations. So that's what that one means.

How did you become so sure of yourself?

I think a major part of it is the people you surround yourself with. A lot of peoples' parents aren't very supportive; my mom is super supportive. She's here right now, and that plays a major role. People seek the approval of their parents and [other] people in their life who hold value, so when they don't get that, it just kind of diminishes the entire situation. I think that played a huge role in me being confident in my skin.

VIBE

March 16, 2017

NEXT: Ravyn Lenae Turns The Colors Of Her Life Into Sweet Music



It's afternoon rush hour in the Big Apple, and despite a mid-February streak of warm weather, the temperature has reverted to its brittle 40-degree chill. That should be light work for 18-year-old songstress Ravyn Lenae, who hails from the windy city of Chicago, but instead, she quivers in between snapshots outside of Le Poisson Rouge, her third to last stop on The Telefone Tour with fellow Chi native, Noname. "I'm not a fan of cold weather," she jokes, bundling up her shaggy Big Bird yellow cardigan. Despite the occasional shiver, Ravyn effortlessly shifts from profile to full-body shots as she poses against a mural of a world, diagonal to the Bleeker Street concert venue. After the mini photoshoot wraps, she walks with purpose past a deformed line of anxious fans barricaded by metal gates leading up to the entrance. Whispers and subtle motions of recognition trail behind her as a security guard shuts the door, silencing the loud chatter outside.

The Rouge's toasty basement welcomes us back in, prompting Ravyn to peel her cardigan back, unveiling a coral tube top, high-waisted pants and vintage-style platforms. Following a fairly smooth soundcheck that only endured two interruptions—the first of which was by a call to alert her that her Thai food delivery was waiting upstairs, and another to correct the echoing feedback that was blaring from one of the speakers at stage left—Ravyn is fully ready to spend her hour and change 'til showtime chatting.

While her small talk often fuses with witty humor, Ravyn's more intimate dialogue is steered by her senses. She speaks and hears in colors—symptoms of synesthesia, a condition that essentially merges

one sense with another. A curious fan diagnosed the artist a couple of shows back and since then, Ravyn has warmly embraced the label, often using a selection of Crayola-named colors to navigate the conversation.



Ravyn herself is a young woman of purple, red and yellow hues. Her warm and inviting spirit, which makes even the most guarded stranger at ease, illuminates with pure yellow light. Her rose red hair, which has temporarily been coiled into box braids instead of her signature bob, speaks to her fiery and independent personality that isn't deterred by other people's opinions. And she often projects a royal purple glow of elegance, strength and self awareness as she weaves in and out of pondering and answering questions. Those shades will find their way back into the discussion and later into her stage banter, as well as others from her imaginary stash.

"I like patterns, anything fun," she says in reference to her fashion sense. "I think as we get older, we tend to get boring with our clothes. Kids have the cutest [clothes]. They have polka dots, hearts, all of this cool stuff. Why all of a sudden do we switch to boring after our 20s? It's just so cruel. We have to keep that liveliness on the outside to portray what's on the inside." Although Ravyn is on the brink of her early twenties, she isn't willing to get swallowed whole by that typical narrative. Scrolling through her Instagram account, it's clear she keeps the kid spirit alive, opting for loud, striped and abstract patterns. Her favorite zig zag-printed clogs and multi-colored pom pom earrings are only two of the articles in her wardrobe that speak to her retro aesthetic.

Just the same, her passion for patterns rolls over into her musical style, which she trademarks as "dream-scape." "I don't like the tag R&B," she declares. "I think [my music] is beyond that; it's more cosmic." Although it's unlikely to catch Ravyn sporting a galactic-themed ensemble, constellations may be her favorite pattern. After all, the singer has a fascination with the night sky. More specifically, she is captivated by the moon. "I have an obsession," she admits. "I feel like the moon is a very beautiful woman. She's in control. I feel like I'm [her] sometimes." As she attempts to form clear sentences to explain her deep connection, she suddenly remembers a mission she and the rest of her band and crew have on their next tour stop in Canada. "We're actually going to Toronto, and we were all going to get a tattoo," she says as she turns to her iPhone for her tattoo sketch. After a couple of seconds of fishing through her media library, she finds what she's been looking for. It's a black and white sketch of a crescent moon incorporated with the bottom half of a woman's face. "But a black girl," she chuckles, suggesting the artist will have to alter the skin complexion and make her nose a little "fatter." Soon, Ravyn will be inked with Earth's favorite pendant, but in the meantime, she has integrated it into her musical projects.

Her latest EP, *Midnight Moonlight*, the follow up to her debut project, *Moon Shoes*, drops only hours after her New York show. Just casually conversing with her DJ during soundcheck, Ravyn comes to the realization that the name of her EP might have been drawn from a “cute little saying” she learned in choir practice when she was a sophomore in high school. But delving even deeper into the reason behind the album title, she reminisces on the feeling she had while recording it. “The name [*Midnight Moonlight*] stems from me listening to the songs. It was always 1 a.m. or 2 a.m, and I was like wow, this music feels like midnight, sitting under the moon,” she remembers. “So I was thinking that it was kind of cool to put those together. And I’m still flowing with the moon thing.”



While her first and second project fall in line with the lunar trend, Ravyn assures that fans get far from the same material. In fact, she boasts that there is a progression lyrically, vocally and, of course, visually. “A lot happens in a year or even a couple of months, and I think it shows in my music,” she says. To her, *Moon Shoes* was an infant project. It was simply “slopped together,” but in a good and organic way. “I was just making music,” she admits. Despite its willy-nilly process, Ravyn managed to attract an impressive audience with her soulful vocals, that carry a 50s-style twang to it (at times, her musical influences like Erykah Badu and India.Arie sneak into her style, too). Her single “Free Room,” that blends her classic style with modern Chicago house music, is definitely one of the standout tracks.

Midnight Moonlight, on the other hand, was nurtured by a schedule. “That doesn’t take away from the creative process, but it definitely sets a different tone,” she explains. In addition to her evolution in the creative department, she’s also grown musically speaking. “I think I challenged myself vocally and my writing style is a tad different in [*Midnight Moonlight*]. It’s more mature. I picture *Midnight Moonlight* being the mom of *Moon Shoes*,” she says. Even though she’s touring nationwide, the singer is still a student at Chicago High School for the Arts in Humble Park. She admits it’s intensely difficult to balance a singing career and her schoolwork, but says her classical background has helped her 100% with conveying that maturity, from altering her breathing techniques to her overall understanding of Western European music and jazz. Her color palette has also blossomed from one project to the next. “*Moon Shoes* is more pink and yellow and youthful, while *Midnight Moonlight* is a little more blue, purple, more sultry.”



Even those without her colorful superpower can probably see the shades in *Midnight*. The six-track project sounds a lot like an ode to love and relationships. Her sensual number “Unknown,” reflects a somber, yet sexy aura of blues as she sings about a particular loneliness that overwhelms her when the night hits and she thinks of a certain someone. “I’m only lonely when the night won’t hold me / I long for a warning / Won’t you let me know,” she sings with a chillingly low pitch. The project’s third song, “Spice,” illuminates in more of a purple gradient. The fairytale single feels like a romantic evening dinner in a Spanish city in front of a magenta sunset.

Ravyn doesn’t know all the answers, but she still holds this tangible, confident sense of self. She has somewhat of an old soul in the fact that she has come to terms with her uniqueness and talent and isn’t afraid to show it off, but that doesn’t come across as arrogance. Instead, she is simply passionate and warm-hearted. “I think a major part of having that personality is the support system at home,” she says. “A lot of the bravest people aren’t fully brave enough because they’re not having that full support from home, which is really where you seek that support. It’s cool if the world loves you, but if you go back home and your mom is [cold], it diminishes the entire aura. I think that the way I was raised and the people who raised me definitely instilled that boldness in me.”



Her mother, Angela, is the farthest thing from cold. She's on tour with her daughter, often seen organizing merch on a neatly set table parked just outside of the main concert hall. Her manager, Lyrical, is also warm and appreciative, as she cracks a joke here and there. It's almost comedic to see how fun-loving and high-spirited they all are, considering the media's critical review of Chicago and the continuous violence that rains over the city. Just four days after the Presidential Inauguration, Donald Trump threatened Chicagoans on Twitter, insisting he would send in the Feds, "if Chicago doesn't fix the horrible carnage." To that, Ravyn says she doesn't give any of it her time or energy. "I like to steer away from politics," she says. "I'm not a fan of him... In the black community, we know what's up. So I don't think it needs to be said or spoken on."

Instead, Ravyn focuses her attention on the positive things coming out of her hometown, namely the many talented faces finally getting the recognition they deserve. Although they are all at different points in their career—Chance the Rapper leads the pack with a record three Grammy wins—the singer reveals they are all united in lifting each other up. "I feel like we're all one big, musical family because we support each other. We go to shows, we cap on each other's songs. It's a huge support base in Chicago that I can't compare it to any other city, music wise. I'm really thankful to be able to be friends with the people I am inspired by." She also uses that support and success of her friends as inspiration. "It's inspired me to the point of seeing that it is possible, that a girl from the Southside of Chicago can do it."



Being the independent person that she is, however, Ravyn's finish line is fairly different from her fellow musicians. In five years, she sees herself somewhere in Hawaii or under the palm trees, making music her way. And awards, while they are cool, don't hold much importance to her. "I think the biggest reward is not physical," she says. "I rather obtain things spiritually. I mean, it's so cool to be acknowledged by the public, but that's not my goal. That's not why I make music. I would do it anyway, if there was no reward." Ravyn may not care about gratification from her peers or fans, but she does have one request of them: to feel the colors.

ESSENCE

March 27, 2017

New & Next: Ravyn Lenae Is a New Voice Out Of Chicago That You Have To Hear

The singer's new EP 'Midnight Moonlight' dropped earlier this month and she's just rapped up a tour with Noname. ESSENCE talks to the singer about her new music, touring, and what's to come.



Ravyn Lenae is the latest Chicago artist making a splash in the music scene. With her genre-blending R&B and dreamy vocals, Lenae is one of the year's most buzz-worthy artists. ESSENCE spoke to the singer about her new EP, what she learned from touring, and how her music comes together.

You just released a new EP, *Midnight Moonlight*, which is a blend of different genres. It's still rooted in R&B, but there are so many other sounds. Where did the sound for the new EP come from? What was inspiring you at the time?

The idea for *Midnight Moonlight* was mostly inspired by the moon herself. Advancing from my previous EP *Moon Shoes*, I felt it necessary to dig a little deeper into who I am and the relationship between my music and the moon. While creating the project, I initially felt each song carried blue/purple hues. These colors represent a sense of depth and high emotion. While listening to the songs, I would visualize sitting underneath the stars staring at the moon, which is where the name of the project was derived.

Your songwriting is great and you always seem to find the right tone for each song. How do songs come together for you? What's your process like?

My songwriting process is based on a formula: Color, tone, words. When I hear production, I initially identify the color that resonates with me. From there I am able to translate the color into tone or emotion, which may depend on a number of things. For instance, red may trigger a sense of slight

aggression, passion and swagger, while pink may take me to a place of innocence, youth and femininity. With these emotions, I am able to jot-down words or lines that capture the hue of the song.

Your first EP *Moon Shoes* came out last year. What would you say the common thread, if there is one, is between the two EPs?

The common thread between *Moon Shoes* and *Midnight Moonlight* would definitely be their connection to the moon. However, I feel they both capture a very different quality of the moon. Perhaps "Moon Shoes" epitomizes the moon during the summer, while "Midnight Moonlight" the winter.

You've recently wrapped a tour with Noname, was that your first time on tour? Did you enjoy it? What is it about it that you enjoy or dislike?

The Telephone Tour with Noname was a beautiful experience. Because this was only my second tour, I was not quite prepared for the small details that touring entails. I quickly realized how imperative it is to sleep, eat healthily, and rest my voice. I think it's very easy to get lost in the idea of touring and forget that your body is not a machine and can only function if you treat it with love.

I mainly enjoyed touring because I was able to connect with my supporters on a much deeper level. It is one thing to read encouraging comments online, but another to actually experience such beautiful people in-person. I was constantly reminded that music is much bigger than me, and there are real people with pulses and emotions that stand in the cold for hours to experience my music. I am truly humbled and grateful to have joined Noname on a wonderful tour.

You're a member of Chicago's Zero Fatigue, can you tell us how you joined the collective and what it's all about? Is it just a music-focused collective or are there other ventures?

Zero Fatigue is simply a group of talented musicians who love each other. A major part of making beautiful music is bonding with beautiful people. We all met through Classick Studios, in Humboldt Park. There, we were all able to develop artistically while building life-long friendships. I am so proud of my friends and how much they have grown as artists and people. I am so happy that the world is recognizing their talent!

How has Chicago's music scene and community changed now that the city's artists are getting more and more attention?

The music scene of Chicago has played an integral role in my evolution as an artist. Unlike anywhere I have ever been, Chicago has a unique sense of unity that encourages all artists to be their true selves. Artists like Chance the Rapper serve as a constant reminder of the power and influence of music, reminding all of us of our roots and dedication to our city.

You're 18, so you have a long career ahead of you. What are the things on your bucket list right now?

Honestly, I try not to create a bucket list or timeline for my life, mainly because I'd rather it flow naturally and organically without the stress of my expectations. However, I would really like to travel the world a few times. Music has taken me to heights I couldn't imagine and would love to see how far it is able to stretch.

What are your plans for 2017?

My plan for 2017 is to begin working on my debut album!

FAKE SHORE DRIVE

March 2, 2017

FSD FEATURE: CATCHING UP WITH RAVYN LENAЕ ON THE TELEPHONE TOUR



Ravyn Lenae has been busy. Joining Noname for a nationwide tour and gearing up for the release of her second EP, *Midnight Moonlight*, later this month could very well propel her as one of the premier up and coming R&B acts in music. Oh, and she's still in high school.

I met up with her before the second night of the Telefone Tour's Chicago stop to discuss what drives her writing, plans for the future, and her place in the Chicago music scene. If for some reason you're still sleeping, take this chance to get to know Ravyn Lenae before her new project, *Midnight Moonlight* drops tonight.

As I make my way into the Metro, I notice a line of people waiting nearly down the block to get patted down. Even on a frigid February night, this is the drill for a Chicago rap show. Nonetheless, the line seems to be abuzz with excitement for the show that's waiting for them.

I get led to the green room by Ravyn's manager, Lyric, and her mother, Mama Angie. We stroll past the Metro's dark and moody lighting. The green room is brightly lit, snacks strewn about, and roomier than you'd think. Showtime is in about an hour, although you'd think this is the afterparty. The band and

other friends of Ravyn and Noname are hanging around, drinking beers and teasing each other; having fun. In the back, behind her makeup artist, sits 18 year-old Ravyn Lenae. Eyes closed due to eyeshadow being applied, she sits, quietly speaking to her makeup artist as her friends hoop and holler several yards away. This is a big night, not just for the two featured performers, but for the whole family. Eyes still closed, she moves around her makeup artist and grasps my arm tightly; the closest thing she can do to a hug in her sitting position. The gesture isn't awkward or clumsy. A habitual hugger, I can tell she's had to do this from the same position before.

Tonight is Ravyn's second on the tour, and the second consecutive night in Chicago, the hometown of everyone involved. For the last few years, Chicago's music scene has become one of the most notable forces in the music industry. Musicians like Chance the Rapper, Saba, and of course Noname are getting recognized as artists to watch, yet at the heart of it all, they're a group of friends who've been making music together since they were teenagers. Although she's been a part of the scene for the better part of two years now, Ravyn is merely one of the newest in a line of success stories in Chicago, virtually the entire city's music community having recently celebrated Chance the Rappers triple Grammy wins.

Like many Chicago Public School students, Ravyn witnessed Chance and others' rise almost firsthand, and now she's become a crucial part of this family. I mention this to her, and she notes the natural way it all transpired, "I think it's just the energy. There's nowhere like Chicago, music-wise. I think it helps that we're all kind of around the same age. It's weird how that happened. That, and we're just supportive of each other. It makes it easier for that culture to develop—that musical culture."

One of the most distinctive aspects of Ravyn's music is the songwriting. Although not even out of high school, she displays a knowledge of people and utilizes storytelling in her work that's consistent with someone much older than she is. Much of this comes from her inclination not to tell "her" story, but to create characters for each song. "I've always been into stories and how words can be put together to portray a certain image. Ever since 4th grade, I've been into writing stories," she explains, "And I've always been in tune with the other voices inside of me. So, I think that now, more than ever, I can speak for those voices. Rarely is it Ravyn speaking [in a song]. More like...parts of Ravyn." I ask if she thinks we'll hear from Ravyn herself in a work at any point. "Yeah, maybe!" she gushes. "Maybe. I'd just have to dig real deep." She laughs after she says this, and her make up artist pauses as it happens. She's clearly used to it.

We stay on the topic of her unconventional method of songwriting, and talk turns to the difficulties it can come with. "I think that the hardest characters to write are the more sensitive ones. I'm a very private person. I'm emotional, but I try to conceal it in a lot of ways, so it gets hard to tap into those more vulnerable characters. The hardest [to write] has probably been the character from 'Sleep Talking' off my *Moon Shoes* project. It was the hardest to tap into, but I think that people enjoy that song the most *because* it comes from a place of vulnerability and, uh, *discomfort*." I mention here that I'm among those people, as it's recently become a favorite from the EP for me. "See? It's crazy!" she says, in perhaps the most humble way I've ever seen someone accept such a compliment.



When asked about just where this tendency to write beyond herself and her own experiences comes from, she credits it to “being raised by some powerful and mature women. But also sometimes the characters are older than me. Or *much* older, so that’s how they come out. I don’t know. It’s really, really weird.”

Still being in the middle of high school as *Moon Shoes* was created, Ravyn explains that it wasn’t originally a project, “It’s funny,” she tells me, “I didn’t even know I was recording a project. I thought I was just recording music. It was that time when I was just getting into the music scene and meeting everyone. I was super thirsty to get all my thoughts out and the music and the stories that I needed to tell. So, it didn’t come about until after I had made all the songs and was like, ‘Oh, this kinda sounds cohesive. Why not make it into kind of a debut thing?’ It happened really organically.” That approach to simply having fun making music is something shared amongst Ravyn’s circle of musician friends, which includes regular collaborator, producer Monte Booker, and St. Louis transplant Smino, who had just moved to Chicago around the time *Moon Shoes* came together.

I ask about any plans for a project in the near future, and she explains that it’s coming; “I *am* working on an EP...It’s called *Midnight Moonlight*, and it’s dropping sometime next month [Friday, March 3rd]. If, you know, if I do what I’m supposed to do [*laughs*].” Ravyn goes on to explain the differences between her freshman and sophomore efforts, “I think the biggest difference is definitely vocals. I’ve advanced a lot vocally and it shows in my writing.”

Still, she makes sure to say she won’t be straying from the loose plan she used for her debut effort. “I like to keep that mindset of me just being the musician making music. Because as soon as it becomes more than that, the music is either booty, or your heart is just not in it.”

Ravyn asks to pause the conversation when she sees her friend Elton Aura off alone texting someone on his phone. She tells someone to inform Elton that she requests his presence. She immediately quizzes him on when his lady friend she’s heard about will be coming through. Elton, almost embarrassed, assures her that they’ll meet. As he leaves, she smiles, but gives him a look that promises she’s playing no games about meeting this person her friend is getting close to.

I find myself looking around the room, noting the various musicians, artists, and photographers boisterously joking around with each other. This is their friends' night, meaning they're sharing in the joy. Ravyn notices this, and gets ready to get them to quiet down. I tell her it won't be necessary. For a brief second, I notice a focus on her face that wasn't there before. This is the collected fierceness I imagine she brings to studio sessions, to writing every morning and every night before bed.

As she prepares to wrap up senior year, even at a school for performance arts, Ravyn is clearly ready to start the next chapter. "I'm ready to get out of there, you know?" she says, smiling but still very definitely meaning it. "I feel like everything runs its course, and this has definitely ran its. His? School isn't a "his" is it? *[laughs]*. I definitely appreciate everything I've gotten out of ChiArts, and I think I'm doing a pretty good job of applying everything they taught me into the real world and my own career, but I'm definitely ready for the next chapter in my life. Personally and musically." Without her saying it, or only listening to her music, it can be easy to forget just how young she is, and how much more she can still do.

I bring up an older interview she did, where she mentions that she still plans to keep at school alongside her career. "That was a really old interview then," she scoffs, almost at the idea of herself saying that. I ask what exactly changed her mind. "I think after a while, I grew more confident in myself. At one point, I thought, 'Ehhhhhh. This isn't for real. Or at least as real as I wanted it to be.' Maybe in that moment it was not. But now, I'm seeing the growth, and asking what does my gut say? What does my heart say? Whatever it says, I'll run with it. I don't wanna wake up one day, still in school and regretful. I feel like the stars have aligned for me and I wanna hop on them. Why not ride it while you still have it? School will always be there. But this? This is *now*. It could be gone next week." She mentions that she's never been asked that question before, but I get the sense that she's gone over it many times in her head. Upon being asked the difficult question of just why she thinks her music resonates with people, she contemplates her answer for a few seconds. "People definitely like things that sound pretty, and I think I try to put that element into my music. Prettiness, and flowery, and... *light*. But people also resonate with my unique approach to writing and lyrics. Everyone talks about love and relationships and stuff, but it's how you manipulate that into your own thing that can be understood on a broader range. I try to make it that spacious for people. Something can mean *this* to you today, but mean *that* to you tomorrow," she says. I tell her that she's good at that thing no English teacher seems to be good at succinctly explaining, "show don't tell." It won't feel like she's explaining to her listener the happenings of a relationship, but going over what that relationship *feels* like. It's hard to describe sufficiently without looking slightly pretentious, I think, but I must've done it, as she understands me. "Yeah! See? We're here," she goes, gesturing between our headspaces.

The initiation of what has undeniably become her signature sound wasn't purposeful, though. "I didn't even know [having a sound] was a thing! People kept telling me I had one and I was like 'What do you mean? Duh, it has a *sound*, it's music!' But for people to be able to pick out my music, like, '*This is Ravyn Lenae*', it was weird. It wasn't purposeful at all." I mention that while some songs have begun to sound like her, tracks like "Free Room" and "Venezuela Trains" show a clear departure from other smoother records she's put out. "I try to maneuver and dip and dab. I don't like to box myself in," she says, smiling, coolly, but I can tell how serious she is about it.

She pauses to gush over the job done on her makeup. "I love it," she jokingly sings, which honestly still sounds great. "I think Solange did something like this,". She's obviously pleased with the work her friend has done.

Solange is an artist that the songstress has found herself listening to lately. When I press for more of Ravyn's Current Hot list she smiles, ready to talk music. "I've been listening to Childish's new shit [*Awaken, My Love!*]. I've been bumping Sampha's new album, *Process*. Like, it's such good quality. He produced that whole album by himself, you know that right? It took him years, but his writing, and everything is just very polished. So, I rock with Sampha." That approach of taking one's time to craft a great work, regardless of what the masses or others might tell you needs to happen, is something Ravyn herself subscribes to. On the topic of this leading to radio success, she was fairly blunt, "I feel like when radio is the goal, you're doing music for the wrong reason. You know? I don't make songs like 'Oh, this is going to the *RADIO!*' That's just so lame to me. Like, make music. If it happens to get on the radio, cool. But who even listens to the radio anymore?"

When discussing her current listening rotation, I ask about Ravyn top 5 albums of all time. "Five? Ooo why would you spring that on me?" she says, still ready to take the task. "*Speakerboxxx/The Love Below*," this one comes easy, and she takes a pause after it. "*Mama's Gun*, uh-hh, *808's [& Heartbreak]*," I remind her we're at three so far, "Crap!" she's starting to realize she's running out of slots. "Stereolab's *Not Music*. What was that, four? I'm doing good!" and she is, as I've seen people restart their list a couple of times while going through it. "And uh-hh. I had one in my head. Hold on," she takes out her phone to go through her library. This one is crucial. "Maybe... What's that N.E.R.D. album? *Seeing Sounds!*" *Mama's Gun* seemed like a no brainer for her, as Erykah Badu's influence is clear in her work, but I have to mention I was surprised *Miseducation* didn't make it to her top 5. "Really? Why does everyone assume those things about me?"

Our conversation finds its way back to her writing style, and I bring up the idea that a writer will always be, in some way, speaking from their own experiences, as a disguise is ultimately just a self-portrait. "[The characters are] elements of me. Yes, definitely," she tells me. "I mean, it's coming from me, so there's obviously a piece of Ravyn there. And the fact that I can even make it up shows it comes from Ravyn's experiences." Those experiences obviously being largely due to the women she was raised around.

The entire time we've been talking, Mama Angie has been zipping back and forth. Occasionally, she's made sure Ravyn had anything she needed, but mostly she's been speaking with her manager and going to an alcove in the back to handle some business-appearing activity. "I wouldn't have been as into myself and starting a career in music if my family didn't support me the way they do," Ravyn explains, as we notice Mama Angie moving past us. "You want that support, you know? I think a lot of artists get discouraged when they don't have that from the people they're closest to. I think it's played a major role in the artist I've become."

When asked about what her mother does specifically, and if she can be said to be part of Ravyn's "team," she thinks on it for a bit, given more room now that her makeup artist has left to grab something. "Um. Are you a part of my team? Yeah, she manages things for me. Makes sure I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing. And everyone else. She 'takes role.' She's a mom." This last comment reminds me of when I entered the building, and had some difficulty with the venue getting to the green room. Mama Angie quickly came and fairly politely, yet firmly told the venue operators that I had to be backstage, in a way that only a mother running out of patience could.

Despite this tendency to step outside of herself in her music, Ravyn explains that the closest she's come to writing about herself is her song "Sleep Talking." "That's why it was the hardest song to write," she

says. “Yeah. I was so nervous when I released it. And I’m sure people don’t think of it like that. ‘Oh, this is Ravyn’s life story.’”



It’s time for me to take my leave so that her and the crew can continue getting ready. She’s had all her makeup applied by now, so she stands up to give me a proper hug, still careful not to smudge my face. I wish her luck, still unsure of how uncouth that is, given the setting. She smiles the entire time. After watching an opening act by Ravyn and Noname’s close friend, and Ravyn’s keyboardist, Akenya, another rising Chicago act, the crowd is ready for Ravyn to take the stage. She enters the scene almost like part of the stage design. Walking around stage without shoes on, she’s at complete comfort. She glides through most of *Moon Shoes*, which sounds great live. Then, in a really amazing moment, she performs Solange’s hit, “Cranes in the Sky.” Ravyn brings a softer, more careful feel to it, which works really well alongside the rest of her set.

I look at the faces in the front row, and most people seem to be genuinely and completely moved. One girl is nearly crying. I imagine that many that are a few feet from Ravyn have been following her career since the release of the first couple singles. At one point, she holds the mic to select people up front, offering them the chance to sing the vocalizations she does on “Blossom Dearie.” Few can get it just quite right, but her face shows she likes interacting with her fans this way. I’ll bet this part is gonna be a big hit on tour. After I’ve seen her run through her songs for the second night in a row and leave the stage, I find myself genuinely wishing the time had run by slower.

After her set, Ravyn joins Noname for a rendition of “Forever,” a song off Noname’s *Telefone* project which she appears on. The second night of the show has had a different energy. Although backstage was full of laughs, a the dark cloud of losing a friend hung over most of the performers. Dinnerwithjohn, AKA John Walt, a local rapper and singer born Walter Long Jr. had been murdered the day before. Just the two of them had performed “Forever” the previous night, but this time around, they are joined by Joseph Chilliams, Walt’s cousin, who also features on the song. It’s a heartfelt performance of a song about not getting to be with the ones we love as long as we’d like.

The crowd, I would guess largely unaware of the real sense of loss everyone on stage feels, sways happily. It’s a beautiful record. A little while later, for an encore, Noname will perform “Shadow Man” alongside Smino and Saba, another one of Walt’s cousins. It’s a song more concretely about death, as

the three artists muse over what their funerals will be like. Saba is visibly shaken up after his performance, having had to say goodbye in a very real way. As his friends surround and hug him on stage, it's a moment that perfectly exemplifies the Chicago music scene of which Ravyn is a proud member, not just as a group of friends, but as a family. In the wake of tragedy, even in the midst of the grandest kind of success, they come together, not merely physically, but through their art. They're a group of people who have worked both together and separately for moments as surreal as the past couple of nights have been, and as the rest of the tour will be. As Ravyn said, this is now, and it could all be gone next week, which I think she and all her friends feel makes everything *that* much sweeter.

Chicago Tribune

March 8, 2017

Chicago singer Ravyn Lenae Washington talks singing secrets, vintage shopping



Ravyn Lenae Washington

If you think Ravyn Lenae Washington looks as though she might burst into bloom at any moment, you're right. The sunny high school student (she's a classically trained vocalist who attends ChiArts) has rising momentum in the music world (she's touring this spring with Chicago rapper Noname) and a bad case of senioritis. "Graduation is coming up," says the 18-year-old with a grin. "I feel like the stars are aligning for me, and I want to jump on that while I'm young." The singer, whose EP, "Moon Shoes," had critics praising her fluid vocals and spare, poetic lyrics, shouldn't have any trouble making that leap. If she can just find something to wear.

Q: How would you describe your style?

A: I'm really into color. I love polka dots, rainbows, any pattern. I feel like as we get older the clothes just get so much more bland and boring, you know? It's kind of discouraged to be vibrant. So whatever I'm

wearing is pretty much a depiction of how I'm feeling that day. Today I'm feeling happy and vibrant, and so I wore this.

Q: Do you get a lot of reaction?

A: People say, "Oh you're bright!" My little sister is 7, the other day she said, "You wear little girls clothes." I do kind of dress like her sometimes. I like children's clothes — they're so fun. I also kind of like the look of Velma from "Scooby-Doo," or Daphne — maybe in between those two. I was Daphne once for Halloween when I was 10, so it makes sense.

Q: What music are you listening to these days?

A: Right now, I'm really into Solange, Childish Gambino, Frank Ocean, and I'm an all-time fan of Stereolab — I love Stereolab. I feel like that sound that they have, I feel like my clothes are a depiction of how their music sounds. Their music is so fun — if you could hear polka dots, that's what it would sound like.

Q: What are you going to do as soon as the warm weather hits?

A: When the flowers start blooming, I like to ride my bike. It's like a super retro bike my mom got me from Target. It sits low, the handles are wide, it's blue and pink. It's so cute — it's not a sporty bike. I live on the South Side, and I like to drive my bike up to Wicker Park and then ride it around there. The 606 is really nice. And the sun sets directly on it, and it's just so beautiful, pink and red.

Q: You're a singer, so you must have a secret for keeping spring colds away.

A: I wear scarves all the time. Even in the summer, I wear scarves — even a thin one. My old vocal teacher told me that, and I stick to it. The only time I get sick is when I forget to wear my scarf. I don't know, it might be mental, but it works for me. And if you feel something coming on, nip it. For that I like tea — green tea with ginger.

Q: How do you get ready for going on tour?

A: I'm trying to gather up my healthy snacks. And I don't really have that many nice clothes, so I really have to go out and shop before a tour.

Q: Um ... that seems unlikely, but OK. Where are you going to shop?

A: I like to thrift. I think it's the funnest thing ever. But it's a sport: You have to wake up, eat, and then it's a whole day. I like this little shop in Wicker Park called Kokorokoko. And Ragstock, I like a lot. And I have a secret parking space in Wicker Park too. It's really hidden.

Q: So what's your thrifting strategy, beyond being a parking ninja?

A: Most of the time, the goodies are in the back. I don't know why that is, but they're usually in the back. So start from the back of the store and go forward.

RESPECT.

March 5, 2017

Ravyn Lenae Drops 'Midnight Moonlight' EP

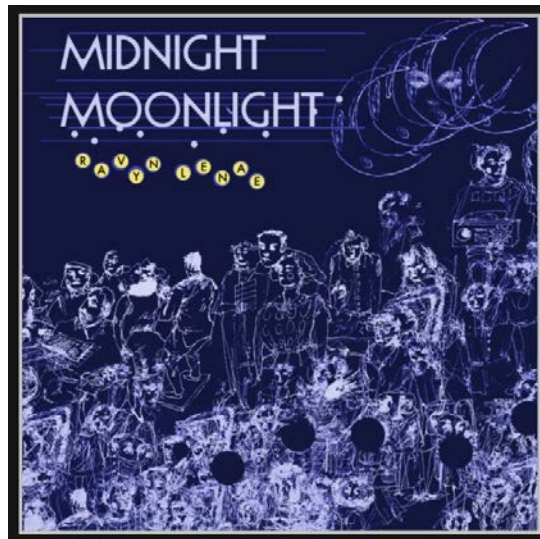


Chicago songstress, Ravyn Lenae has collaborated with many of your favourite artists, from Noname to Saba. She just dropped her second EP, *Midnight Moonlight* via Atlantic Records. Monte Booker provides the unique production for many songs. The EP is the long-awaited follow up to 2015's *Moon Shoes*, which generated a lot of buzz for the singer. In 6 tracks, Lenae showcases her enchanting and harmonious voice, as she takes listeners on a picturesque journey through her creative songwriting. After listening to the album, you'll be left wanting more. Stream the album below. Also, be sure to also catch her live performance on Noname's "Telefone" Tour throughout March!



March 4, 2017

STREAM: Ravyn Lenae's "Midnight Moonlight" EP



Just shy of a year following the SoundCloud release of her debut EP *Moon Shoes*, newcomer Ravyn Lenae drops another gem. Her newest EP entitled *Midnight moonlight* is filled with imagery and raw emotion as Ravyn finds herself navigating through a variety of situations. Previously discussing with BC the importance of growth while transitioning between the two projects, it's hard not to notice her progression.

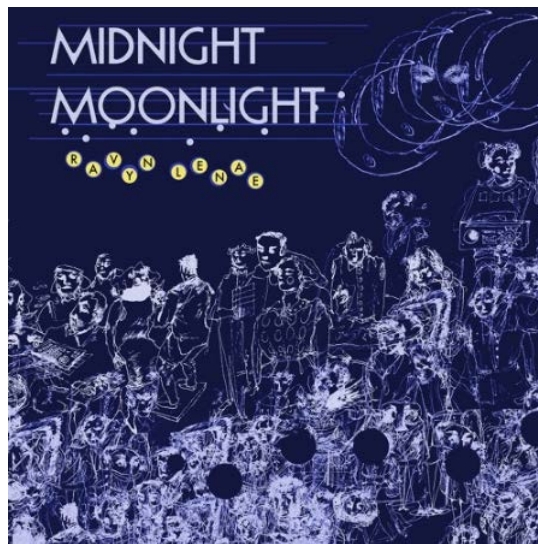
Midnight Moonlight is made up of six tracks – all of which showcase Ravyn's classically trained voice. She uses her schooling and places a remarkable twist on what is now being dubbed as Alternative R&B.

Ravyn Lenae is currently on the Telephone Tour with Noname which is set to end this month in Detroit, Michigan.



March 6, 2017

New Music: Ravyn Lenae – Midnight Moonlight (EP)



Buzzing teen singer/songwriter Rayvyn Lenae told us last year that following the release of her breakout EP *Moon Shoes*, she was ‘just floating’ and didn’t know where she would land, but new music was on the way.

On Friday (March 3), the Chicago native delivered on that promise to fans with the release of her second EP, *Midnight Moonlight*. The angelic voiced songstress is blessed with talent beyond her years, which she continues to share with her growing fan base across the 6-track project.

On the opening song “Genesis,” Ravyn sings about a deep love that feels like it has existed before. “I think I want you for a 1000 / And I think I’ve loved you for a 1000, years” she sings over the reverberating production.

Later, Lenae cooks up an infectious groove on “Last Breath,” where her delicate tone blends into the head bobbing track as she sings, “You got to let me know right now / Are you gonna show right now, right now?”

Ravyn is just coming off tour supporting female rapper Noname, and she has much more in store for 2017. Take a listen to ‘*Midnight Moonlight*’ below.

SAINT HERON

March 3, 2017

RAVYN LENAЕ INVITES US ON A TRIP TO THE STARS WITH 'MIDNIGHT MOONLIGHT' EP



Young Chicago songstress Ravyn Lenae kicked-off her tour with poetic rapper and fellow Chicagoan Noname earlier this year, and today fans were surprised with a new six song EP. Titled *Midnight Moonlight*, the 18 year old continues to grace the airwaves with her soulful, raw aesthetic in what almost feels like an extension of her debut EP, *Moonshoes*. *Midnight Moonlight* is the perfect feel and vibe for a late night listen as it's soothing and filled with her unique sound through every beat. In deep and emotional songs like, "Last Breath" Ravyn Lenae doesn't disappoint by simply being her true and honest self.

EARMILK

March 3, 2017

Ravyn Lenae drops the invigorating, refreshing and dynamic "Midnight Moonlight" EP



We've got some incredible news for you today, ladies and gents, Chicago's own Ravyn Lenae has dropped the follow up to 2016's stellar *Moon Shoes*, the heart melting *Midnight Moonlight EP*.

Paired with Zero Fatigue crew member Monte Booker on productions, *Midnight Moonlight* is a dynamic, inventive and invigorating EP that further proves Ravyn isn't just a singer to keep an eye on, but a star in her own right.

With six tracks and a run time of just under 20 minutes, the EP is short but incredibly rich with dream-like beats, deep lyrics, and a refreshing artistic style. As with *Moon Shoes EP*, Ravyn is unafraid to be daring with her direction and vocal style. As Monte's productions bounce and jump, she handles things with an elegant and captivating grace that demands attention and playback. Ravyn is tremendously talented and the fact that she is but 18 years old speaks volumes about both her maturity and her potential.

While every track on *Midnight Moonlight* is fantastic and helps contribute to the overall beauty of the project, "Spice" is without a doubt its standout. Over Brian Sanborn's extra spicy guitars, Ravyn delivers a flavorful performance with a dash of samba and a healthy dose of confidence. The shakers, the guitar, and the vocals come together to create one of 2017's top tracks.

From "Genesis" to "Thirst", *Midnight Moonlight* is a beautiful breath of fresh air. Give the EP a spin above and be sure to give her *Moon Shoes EP* a listen if you haven't yet. For all things dope music, be sure to stay locked on EARMILK.

VIBE

February 22, 2017

Premiere: Ravyn Lenae Soars On The Visuals For Her “Alive” Video



Rising star Ravyn Lenae once again proves that she has an unparalleled vision with the visuals for her reflective single “Alive.” Although it seems rather short, the music video perfectly matches the Chicago native’s harmonious vocals with her aesthetic.

In the 2-minute video, the hypnotic and electronic-fused instrumentals play in the background as Ravyn showcases her unique sense of style. Clips smoothly transition from the rooms in a luxurious Victorian-style mansion to a hilly landscape as the songstress continues to sing over the slow-burning track. “I feel free, can’t you see I will not always be here. No tears (no), no fears (no),” she sings.

While the visuals seem to represent the softer elements of the track, the song’s inspiration has a deeper connection. “‘Alive’ stems from emotional growth and contentment,” Ravyn said. “Before writing the song, I was swimming in a pool of hurt, guilt and spiritual discomfort. Instead of drowning, I decided to embrace these feelings and express gratitude for the lessons learned. With this new-found sense of life, I am stronger and happier than ever.”

The “Alive” video comes just before the release of Ravyn’s EP *Midnight Moonlight*, which is set to drop on Mar. 3. In addition to the project’s rollout, Ravyn is keeping herself busy on tour with Noname on the Telephone Tour. The trek initially kicked off in Jan. 2017, and will conclude on Mar. 6, in Detroit, Mich.

The “Alive” video comes just before the release of Ravyn’s EP *Midnight Moonlight*, which is set to drop on Mar. 3. In addition to the project’s rollout, Ravyn is keeping herself busy on tour with Noname on the Telephone Tour. The trek initially kicked off in Jan. 2017, and will conclude on Mar. 6, in Detroit, Mich.

NYLON

October 12, 2016

Ravyn Lenae Gives Us The “Free Room” To Find Ourselves

Listen to this slick new remix



Chicago is undoubtedly known for its long list of noteworthy rappers, but for the past year, the city’s southside has been making room for the sounds of singer-songwriter Ravyn Lenae. At just 17 years old, the classically trained artist has been taking the Windy City by storm with her smooth vocals and genre-bending sound.

Last year, Lenae released her debut EP, *Moon Shoes*, a collection of fresh sounds that meld R&B, electronic, soul, and hip-hop into a seamless cornucopia of musical poetry. Today, *NYLON* is premiering Capadose’s remix of her single, “Free Room,” an upbeat, atmospheric, neo-soul track that will make you want to grab your friends and hit the clubs.

“‘Free Room’ tells the story of life: learning and evolving,” she told us. “I sing ‘You don’t know me anymore’ in hopes that those who thought they once knew me, now realize they only knew an outdated version of me. The world continues to spin, and so do I.”

We caught up with Lenae to learn more about how she honed her craft. Read it all in the Q&A, below.

What was your experience in creating the *Moon Shoes* EP? How did you come up with the name?

While creating *Moon Shoes*, I had no idea that I was doing it. The experience was extremely organic, considering that I was making music spontaneously and working alongside friends. I chose to title the project “Moon Shoes” to give listeners a sense of unearthly freedom. I believe each song moves listeners closer to the moon and personal truth.

In what ways has the music scene in Chicago influenced the way you create your sound?

Chicago's music scene is very inspiring. I like to think of it as a small community of friends who enjoy creating and inspiring each other. I think it is important to surround myself with artists who share the same goals and aspirations. This way, I am constantly encouraged to sharpen my craft and challenge myself.

Can you talk about the concept behind the music video for "Free Room"?

While exploring the concept of "Free Room," I knew that I wanted to visually represent the song as playful and fun. I decided to base the video around a party with my friends, where each person is highlighted in a unique way. I wanted viewers to feel completely free and compelled to dance.

When you're not creating music, what are other creative outlets that you like to explore to express yourself?

I enjoy going to shows to study other artists. It is important to always remain a student to my craft. Also, I like to color on a coloring app on my phone. It is very therapeutic and calming.

Do you have anything in the works for the rest of the year?

Supporters can look forward to new music and cool visuals.



February 2, 2017

Ravyn Lenae: “It’s In My Blood to Break Free”

The Chicago singer tells us about her 'Moon Shoes' EP, working on 'Telefone,' and how OutKast influences her writing.



Ravyn Lenae is prepping for bed when our cross-country call connects. Counting down the days until backstage greenrooms take over from high school hallways, the Chicago wunderkind sets a 4 a.m. alarm to catch the bus. To put this in perspective, imagine senioritis, then apply that to a girl who’s generated millions of streams and collaborated with emerging hometown heroes. Lenae is ready to bid farewell to lectures.

A disciple of Erykah Badu and OutKast, Ravyn stitches together everyday observations, internal ponderings, and mercurial puzzles that she herself doesn’t solve until months later. Her characters run point; she lets them lead the way, lifting a page from the notebooks of authorial greats.

The stage offers a chance to share these voices with fans new and old. Last month, she stole the show at our No Ceilings concert in New York, and a nationwide tour with Noname continues in the coming weeks. If you get a chance to see Lenae, take it—you will find yourself instantly enchanted, and the poise and confidence this young artist brings to the stage suggests she has a long and fruitful career ahead of her.

Read on to learn more about Ravyn's stunning Moon Shoes EP, her experience working on Noname's Telefone, and the creative process that enables it all. Stay tuned for more news of her forthcoming project, currently in the works for a spring release.

You've done a lot of great work in and outside of Chicago, especially with Monte Booker, but many fans were first introduced to you through Noname this past summer on "Forever."

It's really weird, because around the time when I started getting into music, these were the people who were already on, people I looked up to. It's really refreshing to be on a song with the people I looked up to. I'd been around Noname a few times before making that song, and there's a mutual respect that artists have for each other in Chicago. A lot of it is unsaid or unspoken, but it's a vibe everyone gives off—like a musical family. So when I was asked to be on her project, I felt very honored, to be honest, because, like, lil ol me? She reached out to me personally and it all happened pretty quickly. I wrote the verse the day before the session.

Even though the current crop of Chicago's top artists are so young, you still feel like the city's future in a sense. What's a valuable piece of advice you've received?

I was talking to Monte Booker. We'd get together at least once a week. He'd drive me home, and on the way home we'd have a whole conversation while listening to music. I remember he told me that no matter where music takes you, make sure you're doing it for the love of the music and nothing else. I think that has driven me because it removes distractions. I make music for me. It's therapeutic and helps me release my emotions. I also like to explore how other people feel, too, so that the music aligns.

It really is. And I think the fact that I have these people around me keeps me in that place. I have humble, amazing artists around me all the time. It keeps me leveled.

Some of your idols—Erykah Badu, OutKast, Pharrell—seem to carry that music-first focus. In what way did your influences impact you most? You're clearly a great songwriter.

Songwriting is definitely a big one. And even beyond that, personality in music. A lot of music lacks that nowadays. Not a lot of people paint pictures anymore with words. I look to artists like OutKast and Erykah Badu because they executed there. I feel like a lot of key aspects of music are being lost, and they need to be replenished by up-and-coming artists.

I've always been into writing, so it came naturally for me. A lot of people ask me if I was into poetry first, and I don't consider myself a poet, which is really weird because of a lot of the things I say. But I just can't say a lot of the things I say without music involved. Poets rely solely on the cadence of their own voice, and I don't see how they do that. I have to have music to relay my message in a clear way, otherwise it'd be garbage. *[Laughs]*

What sounds tend to click with you, guide you in a way?

I like to—I don't want to sound crazy but when working with producers or just write in general, I like to create characters. None of my songs are actually me, they're characters I've created. So everyone has yet to hear Ravyn Lenae's story. They all occupy this other world in my head. I can't tell a story without creating characters and a plot, and the producers I work with help me create that whole scenery—the fairytale, I guess. So a lot of my songs have this sense of delicacy, imagery, sometimes elegance...I like to play with different themes. I've never articulated this before. I've just gone through a lot of different people inside of me and they come out whenever they feel compelled to, or a beat inspires them to come out. Now, I'm in a whole different realm writing-wise and beat-wise than I was for the last project. I know it sounds a little weird.

I think that's powerful. Even if the listener doesn't know your process, that focus will still be palpable. Which song, which character, off of Moon Shoes do you feel most connected to?

Hmm. I really connect with the character I wrote for "Sleep Talking." Just because—I've never talked about this before. Just because I feel like I've been in the shoes of that character and I know what the character's experiencing. It's weird because I write the songs, then I come back two months later or three months later and say, "Oh, that's what I was talking about!" It can take me awhile to figure out what the character's trying to say, if that makes sense. Sometimes they're pulling from my experiences, and I have to figure out what that point in my life was. I get to look through a memoir of my experiences in that way. I have trouble communicating my feelings sometimes. I keep things bottled up. Or I'll put subliminal messages in my songs because I'm private about things. But it's fun to search for meaning, or look for the themes and hidden messages.

A lot of authors say that they know they did a good job when the characters make their own decisions. Has high school helped you in any way or are you counting down the days?

I hate school! There's no way around it. I think it's just the overwhelming feeling of needing to be done with something, needing to move on. I don't like when things feel past due or they're overflowing into another part where they're not supposed to be. It's time for a new chapter. I like being spontaneous, not knowing what I'm going to do tomorrow. I like to search for meaning instead of it being presented to me and taught. A lot of things you can't learn in school. You can't be at a desk. On the flipside, I go to Chicago High School for the Arts, and I'm very grateful to be classically trained and apply that to my own career. That's really helpful. I don't want to trash the school. It's just me as a person. It's in my blood to break free.

I know you've heard this a million times already, but try to enjoy it.

[Laughs] Why does everyone always say that!

How do you view yourself in today's music climate?

This is what I compare it to. You know how everyone has a house smell? When you walk into the house, everyone can smell it except the person who lives there. It's really hard to smell that just because I'm the person doing it, if that makes sense. I love when people compliment my writing rather than my voice, though. Anyone can sing a note. I like words. You can use three words and it means so much. I like to study the way other artists arrange them to mean something. I'd hope that people appreciate my writing style, the way I convey messages—that means much more to me than someone tweeting at me,

“I love your voice.” If they tweet about the writing, then I really connect with them. It’s beyond the melodies, they’re finding depth and meaning.

Have you ever considered stopping music, or has that never been an option for you?

It hasn’t been an option for me yet, but I think every artist is forced to that point. Everyone hits rock bottom but I haven’t yet. I will say I’ve been discouraged. You have people who have their opinions, and an artist needs to develop tough skin. Everyone’s not going to like your music, everyone’s not going to like you. It’s the way it is. I have the choice to take it however I want to, and I try to take it in the most constructive way possible. It’s tough when you consider music your baby, though, and you see people poking at it, calling it names. It’s a vulnerable job.

When did you start working on *Moon Shoes*?

You know, the project was actually super unorganized. I didn’t know I was making a project, actually, I was just making songs, and then it happened to become *Moon Shoes*. It was just me releasing these characters, not knowing it would become a body of work. It just so happens to be a little cohesive. Making music is a super intimate thing. Luckily, with Monte, we were friends, and we established that connection before we started working together. It grew as we worked together. Just the sense of him knowing me, and knowing what I like and vice versa—I love being with a producer when they build something from scratch. Me and Monte will just sit in the studio all day. I think that’s the best way for me to get a sense of what the proper direction is. It’s more organic that way. I don’t really like when people send me beats—unless it’s super raw.

NYLON

September 26, 2016

21 Cool New Artists 21 And Under

It's almost hard to believe that there are artists on the come-up that were born in the new millennium. The next generation of game changers has arrived, and they demand to be heard loud and crystal clear.

We rounded up 21 of the coolest new artists that are 21 years old or under. Their musical talent will completely blow you away, and make you wish that you had tried a little bit harder to chase your dreams when you were their age.

GALLERY Click arrows or click & drag to page through gallery.

Ravyn Lenae

This Chicago-based funk/pop singer began singing in middle school, which isn't that long ago, considering Lenae's only 17 years old. Demonstrating a vocal maturity way beyond her teenage years, the singer belts out soothing pop tracks reminiscent of those played during the height of America's disco days. Which, is quite perfect, seeing as the '70s are all the rage right now.



Ravyn Lenae - Free Room feat. Appleby [Official Video]





September 29, 2016

Ravyn Lenae Shares Introspective New Track "Alive"

The talented Chicago teen is one of the most compelling new voices in music.



Rising Chicago songstress **Ravyn Lenae** proves she's wise beyond her seventeen years with her new song "Alive," a warm, reflective slow burner. Driven by soaring harmonies and immersive instrumentation, "Alive" creates an ambience listeners can't help but get lost in. The song weaves elements of R&B, singer/songwriter and electronic together seamlessly, creating a hypnotic blend that is quintessentially Lenae's alone.

“‘Alive’ stems from emotional growth and contentment,” Ravyn says of the song's inspiration. “Before writing the song, I was swimming in a pool of hurt, guilt and spiritual discomfort. Instead of drowning, I decided to embrace these feelings and express gratitude for the lessons learned. With this new-found sense of life, I am stronger and happier than ever.”

The uplifting track showcases Lenae's impeccable songwriting ability. Her vivid imagery and keen ear for detail shine through as she sings breezily about heartbreak, resilience, and rebirth.

The bouncy production is supplied by Soulection's **Monte Booker**, one of Lenae's frequent collaborators. The duo proves their natural chemistry once again, as Booker's lush soundscape serves as the perfect backdrop for Lenae's staccato melodic lines that unfold into stunning layered harmonies.

Listen to the scintillating track below, catch Ravyn Lenae at **our No Ceilings show** in Atlanta during this year's A3C Festival, and keep up with her on **Twitter**, **Facebook**, and **Instagram**.

NYLON

February 15, 2017

Ravyn Lenae Doesn't Want To Be A Star

Because she's reaching for the moon



In celebration of Black History Month, NYLON is running a spotlight series called UNAPOLOGETIC. Every day, we'll celebrate different aspects of black culture through profiles, interviews, roundtables, reviews, videos, and op-eds. #Blacklivesmatter and we hold that truth to be self-evident.

Even before you notice her head of bright red hair, the first thing that will strike you about Ravyn Lenae is her vibrant energy. The 18-year-old, who is from the South Side of Chicago and has a vocal range that will blow you away, seemingly infuses the air around her with positive vibes.

The day we met followed Lenae's first-ever performance in New York City on the bill of Pigeons & Planes' No Ceilings showcase. When she graces the stage, Lenae embodies the essence of an entertainer; accompanying her arresting voice is a crowd-captivating blast of pure-hearted charisma, exposing a personality as colorful as the clothes she wears.

When we get together for our interview, Lenae is wearing an oversized black-colored shirt and red patterned pants with a pink beret, multicolored barrettes, red glasses, and yellow pom-pom earrings. Her outfits are determined by her mood, she tells me, but almost always consist of multiple pops of color.

"I like color, so a lot of times I pick colors that kind of resonate with me that day," she says. "Today, I'm feeling very, very bright. That's why I have all this color on... I feel like our clothes get so boring as we get older. Like, what happened to polka dots and patterns? Why do you have to be boring when you get older?"

Lenae definitely doesn't have to worry about getting old and boring for awhile—she hasn't even graduated from high school, though she's already a full-time artist. Last year, she released her debut

EP *Moon Shoes*. She's already collaborated with other notable creatives like Noname, Mick Jenkins, Saba, Su Na, and Monte Booker.

Lenae is expected to release her *Midnight Moonlight* EP sometime soon. In the meantime, get to know more about this teen who is too cool for school in the interview, below.

How early did you develop an interest in music?

From the beginning, I always felt artistically inclined. I always knew I wanted to be an artist of some sort even if I didn't know what an artist was. I clung to the arts. I always watched *High School Musical* and those type of things. I guess it all started when my grandmother got me a guitar for my 10th birthday, and I started taking lessons from there. As a smaller kid, I was just really flip-floppy. I'd do something one day, and then I'd be like, "Ah, I don't want to do it anymore" the next day. So I quit guitar and I started taking piano lessons. My piano teacher at the time asked me to compose a piece, and before then I had never written or sang or anything. That was a real challenge for me, but I'm glad he made me do that because I didn't know that I was into singing. After doing that piece, I thought, *Okay, I think I like singing a little bit more than this. Yeah, the piano's a little lame. Let me do singing.* So my grandma enrolled me in vocal lessons, and from there I just fell in love.

Nothing gave me that satisfaction of being on stage and seeing everyone's expression and them crying; it's very heavy. People believe in you. So that kind of gave me that push. Coming out of middle school, I knew that I wanted to make music a career, so my mom and I looked for art schools in Chicago, which there weren't many. It's crazy [because] Chicago is an art city, you know? I decided to go to Chicago High School for the Arts which is in Humboldt Park. I'm a singer now, I've been trained classically, taken acting lessons, music technology; I'm a well-rounded artist, I feel, and I owe it to [school]. So coming out, I feel like I want to take everything [the school] gave me and apply it to who I am as an artist today and go out in the world and basically spill my puzzle pieces.

Can you tell me more about the *Midnight Moonlight* EP?

Before I even named it I was listening to the songs, and every time I listened to them, it would always be at night. I would just picture myself sitting on a hill and staring at the moon. So that's where I got the idea for *Midnight Moonlight* 'cause it would always be around midnight, and I just feel very connected to the moon. My first project was called *Moon Shoes*. Maybe I'll get off the moon after this one... maybe. I think it's tired of me. So yeah, with this one, I wanted it to be smoother. When you're listening to music late like that, you're not really listening to turn-up music. For me at least, I like to relax and listen to subtle music or dreamy music. So I think this project differs from my first project in that way. The first one was a little more upbeat and fun, whereas this one is more relaxed and poised.

How did you decide on this hair color?

Okay, I'm gonna be honest. I have a scarf that I wear, and back then it used to be red. I would be in the mirror, getting ready for bed, and I'd be like, "Wait. This color's kind of cute." So I kind of pictured the scarf as my hair and my beautician—we're really close—and I was talking about it for a little while. I had a rinse when I was in seventh grade, and for eight-grade graduation, I got red highlights, and then freshman year, I just dyed my whole head, so it's been red ever since. My grandma told me that she felt that the red hair fits me more than my actual hair color because it's brighter and more lively. My natural hair color is, like, a dusty brown; it's kind of boring. Maybe I'll change it [one day], but I think everybody would be upset. You can never go wrong with a wig, though, so I might do a wig at some point.

Can you tell me about your tattoos?

My first tattoo is a French proverb, and it says, "Dream your life, live your dreams." This was around the time where I decided I didn't want to go to college and I just felt like I needed that push, so I got it tattooed on me. That's a really scary decision, and a lot of people are college-oriented at my school, so it's really challenging when everyone else is going to college and applying and they're like, "What are you doing?" You can't really say, "Oh, I'm doing this and this and that," where really, I'm just taking it day by day. The artist life is very spontaneous, and I can't say where I'm gonna be next month or in the month after. A lot of people like structure, so there's definitely a risk with being an artist that a lot of people aren't really willing to take. For a long time, I was questioning myself and doubting that, but I feel like the stars are aligning for me and I need to jump on them. I got [my other tattoo in] September, I think, and it's just a cherry blossom with a raven on it. I think that cherry blossoms are very delicate and soft and elegant while a raven is very daring and bold and wise. I think that it's a great contrast [representative of] me as a person. And, I have another tattoo that's just the Aquarius symbol.

I'm actually getting another one. Have you ever heard of a saying, "As above, so below, as within, so without"? It kind of stemmed from that. I want to have two feminine hands and then little puppet strings holding stars and moons and suns, basically saying that I'm in control of my universe and how I go about life. Let's say you wake up and you think to yourself, *Today is gonna be a good day*. It'll be a good day simply because you put that in the atmosphere. You're in control of how you respond to certain situations. So that's what that one means.

How did you become so sure of yourself?

I think a major part of it is the people you surround yourself with. A lot of peoples' parents aren't very supportive; my mom is super supportive. She's here right now, and that plays a major role. People seek the approval of their parents and [other] people in their life who hold value, so when they don't get that, it just kind of diminishes the entire situation. I think that played a huge role in me being confident in my skin.



PIGEONS & PLANES

September 12, 2016

20 Artists Under 20 You Should Know

Listen to the future.



Ravyn Lenae

Location: Chicago, IL

Age: 17

Nothing seems to escape the gravitational pull of Ravyn Lenae's pen. At only 17, the high schooler's attention to detail and versatile vocal talents spell trouble for veteran acts reliant on tired formulas. Moon Shoes, Ravyn's most recent release, explores undocumented territory, zipping through a number of vivid images: hallway politics, untied shoes, carefree summer love, cryptic languages, and damaged lungs.

Better still, Ravyn sounds like no other. Her warm voice—tinged with attitude—tiptoes through melodies before employing lush harmonies that seize your ears. Collaborations with Soulection producer Monte Booker and critical darling Noname suggest that Chicago has yet another secret weapon roaming the city.



HUNGER

October 20, 2016

EIGHT FEMALE R&B ARTISTS WHO ARE SO HOT RIGHT NOW



Rarely considered to be as cool or culturally relevant as hip-hop in the States or grime in the UK, R&B nonetheless has a legacy that predates both genres and is unarguably more influential in terms of mass appeal. And there are few things as perfect as a pure female R&B voice. So, in light of that, we thought we'd look at the best new and emerging female R&B acts around at the moment – many channelling the influence, naturally, of Mary J. Blige, Erykah Badu and Jill Scott – but all offering a fresh perspective both musically and lyrically and creating, in our opinion, some of the best music around.

RAVYN LENAЕ



Just 17 years old and hailing from the current musical hotbed of Chicago, Lenae's debut EP, *Moon Shoes*, dropped this summer and points towards a young artist willing to experiment whilst paying respect to the recent heritage of the genre. Expect to see her name on big tracks with big artists over the coming year and, hopefully, a long career.



October 20, 2016

5 Chicago Artists Who Could Blow Up in 2017



Hip-hop is continually giving more credence to scenes that have not necessarily been instrumental in its inception. Cue Chicago, a city with an emerging rap scene that's garnering more respect with every project, song and video released. Almost every day, it seems like Chicago births a new artist or emcee to watch for—rappers, singers, and producers who have been sculpted early-on by the city's poetry and open mic scenes, or who have seen their friends transform into musicians and decided to play a part themselves.

While Chicago is no stranger to music—blues and electronic dance music found their roots in the city—2016 has been a big year for the third coast, and the city has been busy racking up its rap accolades: Wunderkind Chance The Rapper has become a veritable phenom, turning himself into a global superstar with the release of *Coloring Book*. Emcee Mick Jenkins has been steadily releasing a new project every year since 2014, the latest of which is the diverse, love-themed album *The Healing Component*. Last year, Chance tapped rapper Saba for his single “Angels”; now, Saba’s rise is ever-imminent, particularly as we wait with bated breath for his forthcoming tape, *Bucket List Project*. And let’s not forget about SaveMoney frontman Vic Mensa, who released his first EP post-signing to Roc Nation this summer, *There’s A Lot Going On*.

While every artist on the list below isn’t a rapper, they are absolutely connected to, and a result of, Chicago hip-hop. Here, we present 5 Chicago Artists Who Could Blow Up in 2017. There must be something in the water.

Ravyn Lenae

When you’re young, hungry and able to start your music career early, there is always room—and time—for growth. Those ingredients have been elemental for 17-year-old songstress Ravyn Lenae, who made her debut last summer with her EP *Moon Shoes*.



Lenae brings a delicate and genuine youthfulness to her project, particularly on standout tracks like “Blossom Dearie” and “Free Room.” The airy quality of Moon Shoes feels like the Chicago singer has pulled you into one long daydream, where she navigates love, relationships, and her adolescence—certainly everything that a teenager is meant to explore.



July 2016

MEET R&B'S LATEST STANDOUT LADY RAVYN LENAЕ



Get familiar with the name Ravyn Lenae, because she's going to be around for a very long time. As Ravyn is a newcomer to the GoodMusicAllDay world, I wanted to take the time out to feature both her EP and her latest video. Once you listen to her music, you'll fully understand why.

At the tender age of only 17, Ravyn is making music that some of us R&B fans would consider both timeless and classic. Her songwriting abilities are absurdly advanced for her age, and every melody is filled with a raw emotion that makes it impossible not to feel exactly what she wants you to feel. It's no joke when we say that Ravyn Lenae is going to be an unforgettable name. She has the potential to be one of the greats, I'd be surprised if she didn't end up being exactly that.

Born and raised on Chicago's often turbulent south side, Lenae is part of "Zero Fatigue," a local music collective that boasts artists like Smino and Jean Deaux, as well as producer, Monte Booker. In early 2015, Lenae released her single, "Greetings," which quickly became a household favorite in the Chicago area and beyond. Soon after, she signed with renowned Chicago-based record label, Three Twenty Three Music Group.

Fresh off of the release of her Moon Shoes EP, Ravyn Lenae returns with her latest offering, a visual to her single "Free Room (ft. Appleby)."

If you want a feel good artist that will absolutely compliment every memory you make this summer, Ravyn Lenae is the one. I'm warning you now, if you sleep on Ravyn Lenae, you are 100% playing yourself. We'll have *Moon Shoes EP* and "Free Room" on repeat all weekend. Check Ravyn Lenae out on social media, and make sure you follow her journey, it's going to be one hell of a ride.

FAKE SHORE DRIVE

May 31, 2016

Ravyn Lenae – Right of Spring



Ravyn Lenae is clearly one of the most talented young artists in the crowded Chicago music scene. She stands out — and has from the day we first shared her music. But over the past few months, she's been relatively quiet. Or so you think. She's been working, and garnering a ton of industry interest in the process. The element of surprise at its finest.

Yes, she's red hot at the moment, and recently aligned with Lyrical and Zae's Chicago-based label Three Twenty Three Music Group. The majors are beating down her door, so watch for her to make a few power moves within the coming months. But don't take my word for it, let her music do the talking.

Enter "Right of Spring," the latest and greatest from Ravyn — which may or may not land on the official re-release of *Moon Shoes*, which is dropping later this year. It's going to be a major spring and an even hotter summer for Ravyn, so kick it off with her today on "Right of Spring."



March 9, 2016

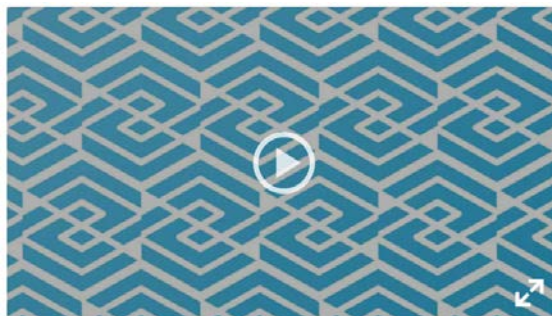
Like Leon Bridges? Here are 8 other soul and R&B acts you should know



When you think of soul music, it's easy to imagine someone in the 1950s and '60s dressed to the nines and crooning over a vintage microphone. Leon Bridges, one of 2015's biggest and most deserved breakout successes, certainly interprets the genre this way. He's such a detail-oriented student of the music he's basically an Instagram filter away from being a facsimile of Sam Cooke. He's a conduit of classic soul and gospel for the 21st century.

Though Bridges, the Fort Worth, Texas, native who's playing Chicago Theatre on Friday, has a distinctly retro-leaning take on soul and R&B, other contemporary artists are stretching its musical boundaries. While Adele, The Weeknd and Miguel may be obvious examples of how artists can be forward-thinking and also reverent of artists before them, this new crop of acts is just as exciting, if not more. In anticipation of Bridges' return to Chicago, let's take a look at the best examples of the former RedEye cover star's peers.

4. Ravyn Lenae



Hailing from Chicago, 17-year-old singer Ravyn Lenae is a part of the city's rising Zero Fatigue collective with producer Monte Booker and rapper Smino. Coming off the fall release of her incredible Booker-produced mixtape, "Moon Shoes," the sky's the limit for this young vocalist—who might be making the most interesting R&B in the city right now.



November 3, 2016

Watch: Rising Artist Ravyn Lenae Premieres “Sleep Talking” Video



The Chicago Cubs may have just won their first World Series in over a century last night, but Chicago has another winner on their hands with songbird on the rise Ravyn Lenae.

If Lenae’s name sounds familiar, it’s because the young singer-songwriter and Chicago native is affiliated with Zero Fatigue, the Chicago music collective composed of other artists such as Jean Deaux, Smino, and producer Monte Booker. Lenae has been catching eyes and ears since 2015, when she released her debut EP Moon Shoes.

Now getting a signal boost from a re-release of Moon Shoes back in July, the 17-year-old singer has teamed up with ThisIsRnB to premiere the music video for the project’s superb track, “Sleep Talking.”

Directed by AZae Production, the visuals for “Sleep Talking” depicts the redheaded songbird mostly alone and reflecting on a relationship from a variety of spaces, from the bathtub to the bedroom. Lenae’s voice, with its island inflection, is hypnotic even as she sings a somewhat somber song, and “Sleep Talking’s” groove feels effortlessly smooth.

Get a first look at the “Sleep Talking” video, and learn more about Ravyn Lenae with our brief Q&A below.



THISISRNB: Congrats on all the success of your 'Moon Shoes' EP so far. Can you tell us about the song "Sleep Talking," love the title and concept.

RL: Thank you! I am still not certain of the meaning of the song. I find hidden messages in my music every day. However, I like to think that the "Sleep Talking" touches on the frustration of not being able to effectively communicate with someone, and the mystery in not communicating at all.

THISISRNB: It feels like you captured the lush elements of the production well with the visuals. The placement of the clocks with the underlying ticking sound was a nice touch. What was your inspiration and forethought for the video?

RL: While brainstorming the video's concept, I knew that I wanted to emphasize the idea of time. Beyond "Sleep Talking," I noticed that the majority of my work generally has elements of time woven into other ideas. I found myself stalking time (watching every documentary on the Internet that had to do with the subject), and sparking a sense of awareness towards time and its effect or, non-effect it has on myself and the surrounding.

THISISRNB: Your voice is quite exceptional, specifically your tone. It's clear you use it as an instrument over the production. Tell us about your growth as a vocalist and artist coming from Chicago, and how the area has and still affects your artistic decisions?

RL: I have definitely noticed the growth and maturity in my voice over the past year or-so. I enjoy challenging myself vocally. I try to push my limits with every song, making each one better than my last. The Chicago Music Scene, or what I like to call a Music Family, has definitely influenced my life and artistic career. Not only are we supportive of one another, but we challenge each other to explore our potential.

THISISRNB: If you travel to the moon on your debut EP, where do you go next? What can fans and new listeners expect from your future release, and is there anything coming soon?

RL: I'm currently just floating. I think that is okay. I don't know where I will land. In the meantime, listeners can expect new visuals and new tunes!



February 4, 2016

Zero Fatigue: Chicago's Next Hip-Hop Visionaries

Chicago's Zero Fatigue crew offers a distinctive sound that mixes digital wizardry with earthy warmth. David Drake talks to them about being inspired by Timbaland and Erykah Badu, and why they don't care about getting on the radio.



The most important thing to know about Chicago's Zero Fatigue crew is that they have a living, breathing sound. Helmed by 20-year-old producer Monte Booker—an avowed aesthetic disciple of Flying Lotus and Timbaland—it's a spontaneous style shaped by the fusion of disparate trend lines, united by a generation raised to never see geography as a career obstacle. Not that their locale is meaningless: Chicago is a city of studios, and the collaborations between Booker, rapper Smino, and vocalist Ravyn Lenae came together thanks to Chris "Classick" Innumerable, a recording engineer who created his first studio when he was only 20 himself. "He always had the doors open and never charged me a penny for anything," Smino says of Innumerable. "He gives us this environment so we can inspire each other, and that's how we became a family." Classick Studios, located on the western edge of Chicago's Ukrainian Village neighborhood, is where Zero Fatigue first bonded last year, and it's where we meet one evening in December.

At this point, Smino says he and Booker "basically live" at the studio, recording tracks for Smino's recent *blkjuptr* and *S!CK S!CK S!CK* EPs as well as Booker's steady stream of SoundCloud loosies; the pair are currently working on Smino's debut album, and Booker is looking to release a new EP on his birthday, March 27. Lenae, who released the excellent, Booker-produced *Moon Shoes* EP last fall, isn't in the lab as often, but she has a good excuse: The 17-year-old spends most of her days studying classical music at the nearby Chicago High School for the Arts.

Zero Fatigue, which extends beyond its three present members to include rapper Jay2AintShit and others, make music with a particularly tactile, organic quality. It stands apart by creating a sonic world in which typical rules work differently: Although Booker's easygoing style feels congruent with the earthy sounds of Donnie Trumpet & the Social Experiment's 2015 LP *Surf*, it's also marked by idiosyncratic found sounds: zippers, crinkles, stickers being unstuck. This music is warm and weird in equal measure.

A St. Louis transplant, Smino, 24, has a melodic vocal style which pushes the tics of someone like Chance the Rapper into fresh territory, stretching and warping his vocals to form a new vocabulary. Jay2AintShit is a more traditionally dense, fluid rapper, whose words unfurl with a formalist's precision. And Lenae's vocals are so elegant and delicate that just listening in can feel like trampling on flowers.

Sitting around a recorder, Booker has the quiet confidence of someone who's found himself through music and is just beginning to recognize his artistic powers. Smino is fearlessly sharp and funny; Lenae, dressed in matching teal sneakers and headphones, is similarly bright and assured. They support each other in ways that feel as naturalistic and joyous as their music. "I only want to work with the people I'm friends with right now," Booker says. "That's what's most important."



Pitchfork: Monte, how did you first get into music?

Monte Booker: Growing up on the South Side of Chicago, my family was always involved in the church, and I loved the music there. I started producing when Kendrick Lamar released [2011's] *Section 80*—after hearing that, I picked up Fruity Loops and started trying to make beats. I started to get really serious a few years ago, making music every day.

Pitchfork: What did you do in church?

MB: I dabbled around but I wasn't really really a musician in church...

Smino: Yo, tell the truth—you were a deacon's assistant.

Ravyn Lenae: *[choir voice]* "Ohhhhh..."

MB: *[laughs]* They playin'.

Pitchfork: Your tracks have a unique sound, how did you come across it?

MB: I started messing with Timbaland and Flying Lotus, along with trap music and jazz. I definitely use a lot of organic sounds and random things *[crinkles a water bottle]*, little pencils and clicks—anything to give it a little more feeling than the sounds everybody uses and to be more creative. I remember seeing videos of Timbaland recording something in the room and then sampling that. I was like, "Man, I can do that too."

Pitchfork: Why do you think your guys' sound stands out?

S: It's the fact that we inspire each other to do us; we're not just sitting here trying to hear what's going on around us. All of us are being ourselves to the highest level that we can. We never stop learning. And Monte got a million beats, so we never run out of inspiration. It's like a never-ending well.

MB: We're trying to come up with new ideas that we've never heard before. Every time I make a song with them, they always do something new. They inspire me to keep going harder.

S: Boy, you inspired by honey buns.

MB: *[laughs]* I love honey buns.



Pitchfork: Ravyn, what kind of music were you into as a kid?

RL: I was exposed to a lot of OutKast, Timbaland, Eminem, and my mom introduced me to India.Arie and Erykah Badu, so I guess I'm a mash-up of those styles. I initially did not think I could sing, though. I started playing piano and guitar when I was in elementary school, and then I was finally like, "I want to sing." So I started taking voice lessons and decided I wanted to go to an art school and take music seriously.

Pitchfork: How do you manage doing music and school?

RL: It's hard—you know how many times I've cried? I'm in school until 5 p.m. every day; I do academics until 2, and from 2-5 I do classical music classes. But I get the best of both worlds—I learn classical music and then I go home and do this.

Pitchfork: Are you planning on going to college after you graduate high school or will you try music full-time?

RL: College is the plan right now, but we're also having conversations with labels—though that's not my main concern. Right now I just want to make music and have fun with it. If the right person comes where I feel like it's necessary to sign papers, we will have to make adjustments. But school is important to me.



Pitchfork: Smino, what were you listening to growing up in St. Louis?

S: I grew up in the church, so it was a bunch of gospel along with Musiq Soulchild, Em, T-Pain—just a bunch of soulful dudes that are country. My first favorite rapper was Ludacris, bruh. When I first heard ["Southern Hospitality"] I was like [*makes "holy shit" expression*]. I liked how he was funny in all his songs. But Kanye is probably my all-time favorite artist.

Pitchfork: How long have you been rapping?

S: I was rapping since I was seven years old, bruh. I got in trouble in school for writing raps on papers in school. I remember this one time, in sixth grade, my teacher was behind me while I was writing this real nasty rap song about this girl. She took the paper, scanned it, and faxed it to my mama. So my mama made me read every word, and every time I cussed she whapped me.



Pitchfork: Are you guys trying to make radio records ultimately?

MB: I don't really care for the radio.

S: I'd like to be known as an artist who redefined radio. Drake redefined pop music. And trap music redefined pop music—there's trap hi-hats in every Katy Perry song now. I want to be that artist, but I don't want to necessarily make music so it can go on radio.

RL: I feel like that's so weird, like, "I'm finna make this for the radio!" Ugh. You doing it for the wrong reason then.

COMPLEX

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Bout to Blow: 10 Dope Songs You Should Be Hearing Everywhere Soon

Ravyn Lenae "Blossom Dearie"



In Chicago a new sound is brewing, cultivated around producer Monte Booker and propelled nationally by the easy listening West Coast vibes of Beats 1 and Joe Key's Soulection radio station. His sound is a sticky, tactile realism, as if his drum sounds were recorded by a Foley artist—shoes tap and hi-hats tear. Chicago is not at a loss for unique artists, but even there, the shadows of Chance and Keef loom large; here is a crew who've found their own terrain. Along with Pigeons and Planes-cosigned rapper Smino (whose "Ciabatta" is a definite standout), it's the innocent hippie-soul and delicate approach of 16-year-old (!) singer Ravyn Lenae that really stands apart, a jewel whose sensibility is so pristine one feels like they're trampling the grass just listening in on her blooming single "Blossom Dearie." Although the sound can seem experimental and a bit left field, at the core of this collaboration is a real heartfelt pop record with a potential audience in the millions.