

JOJO.

JoJo is resilient. That's the message that comes through loud and clear when you listen to *Mad Love*, her debut album with Atlantic Records and her first LP in ten years. She's empowered. She's in control. And she's grown as hell.

You can hear it in her Wiz Khalifa-assisted lead single, "Fuck Apologies." It's a powerful statement of intent that announces to the world that the singer-songwriter isn't going to let anyone make her feel small.

"As a woman, I find myself apologizing for things that I really don't need to apologize for," JoJo says. "Even as simple as when someone bumps into you." She laughs. "Guess what? I'm not sorry *you* bumped into *me*. Overall, though, the song to me is an anthem of empowerment. It's about being confident and comfortable enough with who you are to live unapologetically."

Themes of hard-won independence and strength are vividly realized on *Mad Love*, which swerves from slinky alt-R&B to exultant pop bangers and back again. It's no surprise, given that JoJo, now 25, had a heavy hand in writing the entire album after first attempting to cut tracks penned by outsiders.

"I was starting to lose myself in the process of being sent songs," she says. "But I stood up and remembered that I'm a *songwriter*, and I want to be heard."

Truly finding her voice was a journey that's taken a lifetime. Born Joanna Levesque and raised in Massachusetts, she notched a #1 hit on the Billboard Pop Songs chart with her debut single, "Leave (Get Out)," when she was only 13; she was the youngest solo artist to have a #1 single in the U.S. She followed it up with a string of additional singles, most notably "Too Little Too Late," another Top 3 smash, and the hit album *The High Road* in 2006. **"Being a child star is a weird thing because your identity is put onto you," she says. "As much of an individual as I was, I still had a lot of cooks in the kitchen telling me where to go and how to dress and what songs to record."**

It didn't help that she was trapped in a deal with a label that was defunct, which kept her from releasing music commercially. As the years passed, she earned a devoted following online releasing free mixtapes featuring tracks from top hitmakers like Boi-1da, Chad Hugo of the Neptunes and Da Internz. She collaborated, too, with the producer Noah "40" Shebib on her critically acclaimed

single, “Demonstrate”, and had guest features on Timbaland’s *Shock Value 2* and Pharrell Williams’ Grammy-nominated album *G I R L*. She was finally liberated from her contract in 2013 after 2 lawsuits and seven years of limbo and signed anew with Atlantic.

In 2015, she released a critically acclaimed trio of singles—she called it a “tringle”—to give fans a first taste of the sound she’d been developing with tunesmiths such as Harmony Samuels, Benny Blanco, Wayne Hector and Jason Evigan. Ever prolific, she recorded dozens of songs. But a series of major life events—including the passing of her beloved father and a break-up—inspired her to start fresh at the top of 2016 when conceptualizing the vibe of her first studio album in a decade. Life was too short and she wanted to be in the driver’s seat. **“After losing my father and breaking up with my boyfriend,” she says, “I realized: I cannot keep listening to the opinions of others.” So she started writing again. “I needed it to come from my pen, in a way I would say it,” she says. “I felt like my spirit would die if I didn’t come across with my own point of view. It just poured out of me.”**

It comes as no surprise, then, that there’s so much authenticity and vitality in *Mad Love*.; it’s a document of a young woman finding her way in the world. She’s vulnerable on the opening track “Music,” a spare piano ballad that allows the singer to show off her spine-chilling vocal chops as she recalls her blue-collar roots and pays homage to her late father. “Usually I’m crazily obsessive about chasing my best performance when I’m cutting vocals,” she says. “But for ‘Music,’ I put my perfectionist ego aside and did a couple takes all the way through, singing through my tears. The emotion was more important to me than anything else.” She’s emotional, too, on the haunting “I Am,” the only song from her earlier sessions to make the album. “This song is my mantra,” she says.”

But she turns up the volume on the self-empowering Alessia Cara-assisted “I Can Only”, asks a male suitor to politely stop killing her vibe on the head-nodding uptempo “Vibe”, and demolishes the hater-industrial complex on “FAB”, (which stands for *Fake Ass Bitches*) featuring Remy Ma. For devotees of the woozy R&B slow jams from her JoJo’s mixtapes, there’s something here too—namely “Edibles,” a sultry ode to cannabis consumption that’s bound to be a fan favorite. And on the swooning, doo-wop-inspired title track, the singer commits so fully to retro soul she sounds transported from another era.

If it sounds like there’s a lot of ground covered here, there is—which is exactly what JoJo wanted. She called the album *Mad Love* because it’s the first thing that feels like it’s 100% her voice. **“This album is passionate, crazy, vulnerable and all about the thing that keeps us going—love,” she says. “It’s inspired by the music I grew up listening to—and like my generation, refuses to be put in a box. I tried so many things along the way, but I realized I needed to be true to myself and do this on my own terms.”**

Now, she's ready to turn it over to the fans who have stuck with her after a full decade of challenges. **"I don't want them to experience *me*," she says. "I want them to experience *themselves*. This music is for you. Listen to this in your car, do your workout with it, get ready to it, cry to it. It comes from my life, but it's not for me anymore."** She smiles. "It's for everyone."

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