BRYNN ELLIOTT

With the arrival of her debut EP *Time of Our Lives*, Brynn Elliott introduced the world to a bright new songwriting voice whose talent is backed by extraordinary determination. As a teenager growing up in Atlanta, Elliott resolved to become the first member of her family to apply to college, setting her sights on none other than Harvard University and devoting her high school years to building up her application — all while teaching herself to play guitar. When Harvard rejected her initial application, Elliott reapplied a year later — this time submitting her music as well — and finally gained acceptance to her dream school. After spending her college years balancing her studies in philosophy with writing songs and performing live (including 200 + shows opening for major artists like Brandi Carlile and Alanis Morissette), she soon landed a deal with Atlantic Records and embarked on what’s already proven to be an incredibly vibrant career in music.

In creating the follow-up to *Time of Our Lives* — a 2018 release whose magnetic lead single “Might Not Like Me” hit the top 15 at HOT AC radio — the 25-year-old artist threw herself into an intense period of soul-searching. Following months of self-reflection, she ultimately arrived at the concept for her sophomore EP *Can I Be Real?* — a selection of impossibly radiant pop songs exploring identity and self-image and the sometimes-thrilling confusion of finding your place in the world.

“I think most artists typically write from their deepest place of insecurity, and for me that insecurity has to do with feeling like I can’t be my truest self with the people around me,” says Elliott. “All these songs came from trying to express what I sincerely, authentically feel — they’re about embracing who I really am, and allowing myself the freedom to be that way with everyone.”

Recorded in Elliott’s homebase of L.A. and mainly produced by The Monarch (a duo whose production/songwriting credits include Kelly Clarkson and Nicki Minaj), *Can I Be Real?* expands on the thoughtful yet emotionally potent lyricism of *Time of Our Lives*, an EP closely informed by her philosophy studies. But while Elliott has established herself as a uniquely contemplative songwriter, prone to referencing Heidegger and Descartes in revealing the inspirations behind her lyrics, *Can I Be Real?* delivers a kinetic and endlessly catchy form of alt-pop. And in her vocal performance, Elliott embodies an undeniable warmth, infusing *Can I Be Real?* with the unaffected charm she’s shown in touring with such eclectic artists as Grace Potter, Why Don’t We, and AJ Mitchell and in her radio/TV appearances on NBC’s “TODAY,” MTV’s “TRL,” and “LIVE with Kelly and Ryan.”

For Elliott, achieving the unfettered honesty of *Can I Be Real?* took some encouragement, a boost she found in co-writer Michelle Buzz (an L.A.-based musician who’s also worked with Katy Perry and Adam Lambert). “Before I met Michelle, I was having a hard time finding people I really enjoyed writing with,” says Elliott. “But as soon as Michelle and I got together, there was this immediate burst of creativity. We’re the same age and at very similar places in our lives, so we speak the same language and just completely understand each other.” With Buzz later serving as the executive producer for *Can I Be Real?*, the two songwriters started collaborating in summer 2019.

*Can I Be Real?* turns particularly powerful on “Tell Me I’m Pretty,” a finely layered track sparked from a formative college experience. “In school there was a scandal with the men’s soccer team, where they had a group message that rated incoming freshmen based on their hotness,” Elliott recalls. “It made me think about how, especially in the age of social media, we can’t escape being confronted with other people’s ideas of how we should look. ‘Tell Me I’m Pretty’ came from wondering what it would be like if we moved past being so focused on image, and recognized that there’s something bigger and more important going on inside you.”

One of the last songs penned for *Can I Be Real?*, the EP’s effervescent title track unfolds with a glorious urgency, matching its warped beats and graceful guitar work with lyrics bluntly listing the insecurities that Elliott has spent much of her life attempting to hide. “That song is me acknowledging the parts of myself that aren’t so awesome,” says Elliott. “We get a lot of messages of empowerment these days, and I definitely want people to feel empowered by my music too, but I also want them to feel it’s okay to be human. In some ways, I feel like everything I’ve ever written was leading up to the point of me writing ‘Can I Be Real?’”

Through the self-examination that shaped *Can I Be Real?*, Elliott eventually found her way to a greater sense of confidence — a quality she hopes might carry over to her audience. “I started working on the EP after a tour where I was seeing all these teenage girls in the crowd, and as I was writing I kept asking myself what would’ve been helpful to hear when I was that age,” says Elliott. “So if anyone hears these songs and walks away feeling more encouraged to be themselves — in whatever moment of life they happen to be in — then I’ll definitely feel like I’ve done my job.”

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