

HAYLEY KIYOKO

To the uninitiated, the whole story might seem unexpected...

Closing out 2016 and kicking off 2017, singer, songwriter, director, actress, and rising popstar Hayley Kiyoko headlined the two-part “*One Bad Night*” Tour in support of her critically acclaimed debut EP, *Citrine*. Even though it would be her first proper headline run, every single date sold out. In cities across the country, lines stretched around the block as fans signed rainbow flags to share with the artist during meet-and-greets where they took copious notes and asked deep questions about her vision—down to color palette choices and production. Just under the radar, a welcoming community rallied around her art and only blossomed bigger by the show.

“What I realized is it’s bigger than me,” she says. “The fans care about each other, they care about me, and they also care about the art. I’m simply writing things I haven’t heard on the radio and they happen to be resonating. Every encounter was emotional, impactful, and real, but I remember meeting this one fan at a show. She thanked me for turning her life around. I didn’t turn anyone’s life around; I just created a safe space for them to figure it out.”

In the midst of this whirlwind, *Rolling Stone* placed her among a 2017 list of “10 Artists You Need To Know” as further praise poured in from *Noisey*, *Refinery 29*, *Teen Vogue*, *Paper Mag*, *Huffington Post*, and many others. *Citrine*’s “Gravel To Tempo” cracked 8 million Spotify streams, and her self-directed videos cumulatively generated over 144 million views in under two years. This all happened in between an impressive slate of film and television roles, including *CSI: Cyber*, *Insecure*, and the upcoming *Five Points*.

Emboldened and energized by all the support, Hayley further expands that space on her 2018 full-length debut, *Expectations* [Atlantic Records]. Penned between Los Angeles and Ojai—the album’s thirteen tracks lyrically explore everything from her debilitating concussion and subsequent struggle with post-concussion syndrome, to the ups and downs of dating and relationships. Musically, the singer’s pop palette progresses with the inclusion of ballads amidst the unpredictable and up-tempo alternative dreamscapes fans have come to expect. Her confidence markedly informs this sonic evolution. She makes bold choices in terms of tempo, presentation, and production that belie her signature honesty on a collection of new songs about everything in her life from health to girls to loss.

Fortuitously, the title serves as something of a personal mantra for the songstress. Nobody’s expectations can exceed her own.

“*Expectations* are my fuel,” she affirms. “Because they’re so high, I am who I am. I’m able to show up for myself and do what I do. It’s my biggest strength, but it’s also my biggest weakness since I’m constantly being disappointed everyday by myself and others. It’s a balancing act. Life can be exciting and miserable all at once. Hence, the name of the album.”

Maintaining that balance, she pushed boundaries on each track and widened the scope of this vision. At nearly six minutes, “Mercy/Gatekeeper” pairs breathy delivery with confessional lyrics culled directly from her journal—bringing listeners closer to her than ever before. The cinematic sonic pastiche underscores stark and searing spoken word.

“When I was going through my concussion, I was journaling a lot, which was something I had never really done before,” she goes on. “It was so therapeutic. This is the only song I’ve ever done where I wrote the lyrics first. I was in New York City. I couldn’t sleep, because I was in so much pain. It was 4am, and I was staring out the window. The lyrics for ‘*Mercy*’ are verbatim from that. I go into spoken word on ‘*Gatekeeper*’, which was another poem I wrote in extreme pain. This chronicles that time. It’s very special to me.”

Another evolution, “What I Need” [feat. Kehlani] marks her very first studio collaboration. Bay Area siren Kehlani remains the perfect vocal complement to Hayley with their striking back and forth on the track’s verses about a frustrating relationship.

She first introduced the record with the lush production, glistening guitars, and confessional lyricism of “Sleepover.” It quickly leapt past the 10-million mark on Spotify and 7.8 million on YouTube. The follow-up “Feelings” tempered whistling, eighties-style synths and finger-snaps with dance floor-ready bass and a sweeping refrain, “*This love asylum, like an island, just me and you. You spent the night, you got me high. Oh, what did you do? I’m hooked on all these feelings.*”

The 2018 single “Curious” shuffles from a wild beat towards a shimmering refrain hinging on her charismatic delivery — all evidenced by her killer dance moves in the video that portray the song’s confident and flirty theme of asking a love interest who’s playing games, “*are you in or are you out?*”

From the sexy shudder of “Wanna Be Missed” to the glistening “Palm Dreams,” she doesn’t hold anything back by simply being herself. Overturning expectations at every turn is now a tradition you can trace back to the artist’s 2015 breakout viral single “Girls Like Girls.”

“I’ve been told you can’t mention ‘*girls*’ in a pop song if you’re a girl,” she goes on. “I’m doing what comes naturally. I hope anyone can listen to my music and relate to it no matter what their sexuality is. At the same time, I’m humbled and appreciative to provide a voice for people who might not feel represented in the mainstream.”

Ultimately, the bond Hayley built with listeners everywhere proves everlasting on *Expectations*. As a sensitive person who wants to connect, her art continues to resonate more than ever.

###

