On their highly-anticipated debut album *Cinema*, The Marías provide listeners an escape into a dynamic world that is alluring and mysterious while equally charming and inviting. In dreaming up their first full-length, frontwoman María Zardoya and multi-instrumentalist producer Josh Conway mined inspiration from such hyper-imaginative filmmakers as Pedro Almodóvar, achieving an untamed emotionality that acutely amplifies the most intimate of feelings. When met with the exquisite nuance of their sound—the lavish textures, shapeshifting percussion, lyrics sung in both English and Spanish—the result is a body of work that bends reality and heightens the senses to glorious effect.

Co-produced by Conway and Zardoya and recorded in the couple’s L.A. apartment, *Cinema* embodies an eclectic aesthetic fitting for a band who cites influences as broad as Tom Waits and Bad Bunny. But while the album fully echoes their prismatic sensibilities—Zardoya gravitates toward R&B and Latin music, Conway leans toward rock-and-roll and psychedelia—each song spotlights the sophisticated musicality The Marías first brought to their 2017 breakthrough single “I Don’t Know You.” Featuring their longtime bandmates Jesse Perlman (on guitar) and Edward James (on keys), *Cinema* also nods to the earliest days of their collaboration, when Zardoya and Conway first met and set their sights on writing music for film and television.

Born in Puerto Rico and raised primarily in Atlanta, Zardoya grew up in a musical household – learning to play guitar from her father as a child and later starting to write songs of her own. After winning $5,000 in a costume contest, she bought a car and drove from her family’s home in Georgia to Los Angeles in hopes of launching her music career, and soon crossed paths with Conway. A lifelong musician, the Hollywood native had joined his first band at the age of 12 and quickly became enmeshed in the L.A. rock scene. “I played everything from heavier rock to psychedelic to funk, but I always felt much more attached to the production side of music than the performance side,” says Conway, who plays drums, guitar, bass, and piano.

Not long after meeting at a gig at the Kibitz Room in 2015, Conway and Zardoya began dating and working on music together, in an attempt to land placements in the film and TV world.

“When Josh and I were first making music together, we had to really envision the look of each scene,” Zardoya recalls. “We’d get a synopsis from a music supervisor saying something like, ‘This scene takes place in a smoky casino,’ and we’d create an image of what the lighting was like and what the actors were wearing, and all the other elements.”

Within a year they’d amassed an entire bank of material, and in June of 2017 made their debut with “I Don’t Know You.” With their debut EP *Superclean Vol. I* also arriving in 2017 (followed by *Vol. 2* in 2018), The Marías soon gained recognition as an intoxicating live act and earned a cult following in the indie-pop scene, inking their deal with Nice Life Recording Co. and signing with Atlantic in 2021.

Even while making music all these years later, the band still operates much as they did when writing for the screen: “To this day,” María shares, “our songs usually start with some sort of visual component: we’re always picturing the world of the song in our heads.”

All throughout *Cinema*, The Marías reveal this undeniable gift for the elaborate specificity of world-building. After opening on the lush and swooning string arrangement of “Just A Feeling,” the album morphs into the moody urgency of “Calling U Back”—an anti-breakup song that transforms a moment of private longing into something fantastically glamorous (“So I’m-a lay here/Make a drink and have a holiday here/Diamonds on the bed to hold your place here/I won’t be out of your life too soon”). Sparked from a melody Conway first worked out on his Wurlitzer, the track marks one of the hardest-hitting songs yet in The Marías’ catalog, thanks to its kinetic drums and hip-hop-inspired vocal cadence (as well as a serendipitously recorded bark from Conway and Zardoya’s Australian shepherd, Lucy). “Until we’d made ‘Calling U Back,’ most of our songs were pretty dreamy and quiet,” says Zardoya. “When Josh sent me that demo I was really caught off guard by how in-your-face it was, and it felt exactly like the direction we should go in next.”

Another thrilling new leap for the band, “Un Millón” finds The Marías expanding their sonic palette with the potent rhythms of reggaeton (a style of music Zardoya heard often when returning to her birthplace of Puerto Rico to visit family). “María introduced me to reggaeton a long time ago, and I’ve always been curious to see what it would sound like to bring that very unique approach to production and songwriting into our world,” says Conway. One of several songs in Spanish on *Cinema*—whose title The Marías deliberately chose based on its shared meaning across multiple languages—“Un Millón” unfolds in swaying beats, spellbinding melodies, and lyrics expressing a tender affection for Zardoya’s homeland. “I wanted to pay homage to the island and its music and people, so in the song I’m calling out some of the places I used to go visit with my family when I was little,” says Zardoya.

In keeping with *Cinema*’s silver-screen grandeur, The Marías adorned the tracklist with a number of instrumental interludes that return to the same deeply evocative melodic motif. As they draw the listener further into the album’s atmosphere, Conway and Zardoya journey through a whole spectrum of emotion, taking on a raw intensity on tracks like the bold and bass-heavy “Hush” (“I see you fallin’ in my den/Full of lions, full of breath/I take the muzzle from their heads/I’m a sucker for revenge”). “It’s a song for when people are giving you hate or telling you how to live your life, and the only thing you have to say to them is ‘shut the fuck up’—or ‘hush,’” Zardoya notes.

One of the starkest moments on *Cinema*, “Fog as a Bullet” took shape from a stream-of-consciousness piece Zardoya wrote on classical guitar after hearing about the helicopter crash that killed Kobe Bryant. “I remember looking out the window a few days before it happened, and seeing the fog through the hills and thinking how beautiful it was,” she says. “After I found out he’d died, I came up with this song about how something so beautiful can also be so destructive.”

On “Talk to Her,” *Cinema* closes out with a gorgeously sprawling number delivered in finely detailed spoken word. “That song came from a poem I wrote on tour, at probably the darkest point in the band’s history,” says Zardoya. “It paints a picture of where we were at the time: the collective frustration and sleep deprivation, being exhausted from touring and missing our dog. But even though it was such a low point, we were still really trying to remain hopeful.”

The piano-laced track also takes its title from one of Zardoya’s favorite films from Almodóvar, whom she first discovered as a little girl. “I grew up watching his movies and always wanted to be an Almodóvar girl, because they’re all so strong and feisty,” she says. “He’s been a huge inspiration for The Marías from the beginning, especially in terms of our visuals—I love his use of color and all the pops of red, and the very high level of detail he brings to every single frame.”

While creating their debut album, The Marías kept the writing and production process completely self-contained in order to preserve their singular vision. “Every song we make starts out being just for ourselves—it comes from our psyche, our blood, and that definitely informed every second of this album,” says Conway.

And in sharing *Cinema* with the world, the band hopes to ignite a similarly powerful creative impulse in their listeners. “We want people to feel inspired to create anything, whether it’s music or art or whatever else they’re drawn to,” says Zardoya. “Hopefully the songs will help them to break away from real life for a while and create some kind of dream world in their heads—something like the scenes to their own little movie.”