

Created and led by singer-songwriter, composer, and multi-instrumentalist Nathaniel Banks, **Arlie** first began in the summer of 2015 as a solo bedroom project, eventually evolving to a full-band live act by 2017. Taking flight from where their 2018 debut EP ‘Wait’ left off, the Nashville-based outfit’s debut LP “**BREAK THE CURSE**” is an unabashedly joyful, artfully-minded indie-alternative pop album. Slated for release on **June 3** by Atlantic Records, the full-length finds Arlie drawing on timeless pop influences to make music that is at once nostalgic and forward-thinking.

Laced with unforgettable hooks, deliberately naive sentiments, and winking self-awareness set against a genuine grappling with the weight of existential despair, the album is ultimately a journey centered around the theme of transcending societal, cultural, and generational traumas – ‘breaking the curse’ in order to blossom into one’s true authentic self and genuinely connect with others.

The album title also underscores the band’s stance against the long-standing ‘hip vs. unhip’ dichotomy that’s hard to avoid within the world of “indie” music. As Banks explains, “Once you heal and integrate the inner critic in your own head, making peace with and loving all parts of yourself, you don’t feel the need to go around making harsh criticism of other people’s art or music or tastes.”

This notion of growth and healing for the better good – both personal and collective – has been a constant theme since Arlie’s earliest days. When Banks first began the project in 2015, the sound marked a significant departure from his previous solo work as a “singer-songwriter.” He resolved with this new output to only make music he believed in and cared about “one-hundred percent.” He also began self-producing: “I had a vision in my head for a particular style of music I wanted to hear in the world that I wasn’t quite hearing from anyone else… I couldn’t manage to explain it to the producers I had tried working with, so I had to learn how to produce myself.”

Around the same time, Banks met Adam Lochemes and Carson Lystad – musicians and fellow students at Nashville’s Vanderbilt and Belmont University. The three quickly bonded over a shared vision for a more uplifting musical landscape. While they enjoyed the music coming out of the current indie scene, they had all grown tired of the accompanying pretension, elitism, and "hipper-than-thou" energy. Together they sought to create a live show that was expressive, inspired, and universal -- aimed at bringing people together rather than dividing them.

By 2018, Lochemes and Lystad had officially joined forces with Banks on the live front – along with Lystad’s childhood friend Ryan Savage – performing in and helping promote Arlie’s dynamic live shows. The group quickly gained popularity in Nashville and beyond, eventually capturing the attention of Atlantic Records, who released Arlie’s debut EP ‘Wait’ that same year.

The band went on to tour with Rostam, Mt Joy, COIN, and Cold War Kids, perform at marquee music festivals like Bonnaroo and Forecastle, and sell out shows at iconic indie venues like Brooklyn’s Baby’s All Right and the Mercy Lounge in Nashville. Along the way, they curated their own pocket of the Nashville scene, deliberately cultivating a more inclusive space via visual art collectives, immersive theater festivals, alternative-proms, and contemporary dance crews.

After a whirlwind of a year - and amassing their fair share of early buzz - by 2019 it was time to get to work on delivering a debut full-length album. While Banks had always approached this part of the process solo, this time he found himself feeling far more isolated than he ever had previously. As a result of this sense of isolation - and a host of other coalescing factors - he struggled to maintain his mental health while working on the record. Ultimately, in May 2019, Banks experienced a severe mental health crisis that culminated with a stay in a psychiatric ward, and an indefinite hiatus from the public eye.

“If you look closely, many of the lyrics I’d already written for the album predicted what ultimately unfolded,” reveals Banks. In fact, the very first track on the record finds him singing: “i’m gonna rewrite over the hard drive / i’m gonna pull out all the cords / i’m gonna forget all about myself / that i don’t need anymore / cause i’m so sick of fight or flight / all the time.”

While at this point he needed support more than ever, his crisis had heightened tensions with the other band members. Ultimately, the four of them chose to take a break from Arlie in order to work on their individual wellbeing.

“I had lost all sense of purpose or identity,” Banks explains of this time. “It felt impossible to trust or believe in anything or anyone, including myself and my music.”

Determined, however, to make sure nothing like what he and those he cared about had gone through would happen again, Banks committed to intensive psychotherapy and to make self-healing work the central focus of his life. After a few months of this, he finally began to feel energized to resume working on the album – this time as a critical part of the healing process.

In December 2019, Banks traveled to Los Angeles and New York City to work on the songs he’d written with a slew of top alternative producers. He soon realized, however, that in order to effectively work with anyone during this stage of his healing, he would need collaborators able to put themselves into more of a shared headspace and be more intimately invested in this body of work that was so precious to him.

With this awareness in tow – and after undergoing therapy individually and as a group – Banks, Savage, Lochemes and Lystad reunited in Nashville in March of 2020 – nearly a year after the peak of Banks’ crisis. Initially intended as a two-week “trial run” to test the waters in the wake of past conflict, the sessions took an unexpected turn when the city’s Covid-19 lockdown restrictions began.

Suddenly they had two options: collaborate with only one another, or with no one at all. They chose each other. So, without any idea how long the lockdown was going to last, they had to face their differences head on, learning how to be sensitive to each other’s emotional needs, and to live and work together under the same roof in order to bring the songs to life.

During this time, Arlie became a far more collaborative creative unit, with Banks bouncing production choices, arrangements, and the occasional lyrical revision off his bandmates for the first time. Ryan and Adam served as co-producers alongside Nathaniel, while Carson acted as a guiding and grounding source of feedback and fresh perspective.

The year prior had certainly brought major setbacks and challenges for everyone involved. But in 2020, after months of hard work and many long conversations, Banks, Savage, Lochemes, and Lystad emerged from the darkest days of the pandemic with a new sense of purpose, reconciled relationships, better self-care habits, and Arlie’s full-length debut album, BREAK THE CURSE – a fully-formed body of work that embodied all of the above.

Immediately infectious from first listen, BREAK THE CURSE also bears intricate layers of sonic and lyrical depth for those inclined to dig in a bit further. Throughout the LP’s 11 tracks, listeners are treated not only to catchy ‘earworms’ but to a masterclass in subtle musical complexity – with analog, guitar-based sounds juxtaposed against a flexible production style more akin to that of electronic musicians.

Driven by kinetic, punk-rock energy and informed by decades of pop music, debut single “karma” boasts an understated air of nuance and sophistication, but without pretense. Other tracks – like the electronically driven, emotionally cathartic title track “break the curse” and the pop-minded single “landline” – live in an entirely different musical universe, and yet still carry Arlie’s ambitious and unmistakable musical signature, exhibiting a meticulous obsession with saturation, contrast, and space.

Primed for dance club sound systems, “don’t move” features electronic pop-surrealist production and a dazzling percussion section crafted to weave its way into your brain and stay there long after the first listen. While some songs on the album carry a myriad of influences that are hard to pin down, “cool” draws a direct link to Sgt. Pepper's-era Beatles, revealing Arlie’s affinity for the pioneering British band.

Despite undergoing an unexpected – and at times fraught – journey to arrive at the present, it is precisely because of this journey that BREAK THE CURSE stands as something far greater than simply a stunning debut full-length from a promising young band. It’s a vibrant musical testament to hope, perseverance, inclusivity, and enduring friendship; the result of a fiercely talented and tenacious band working in step to prioritize mental health, human connection, and art.

“The songs meant a lot to me before,” Banks explains, “But now that we’ve all gone through these experiences together, ‘breaking the curse’ feels like even more of a mission my collaborators and my community are all connected to – with regard to music, relationships, and beyond.”