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ALBUM REVIEW

HANNAH BAHNG'S LUSH, LOWKEY SELF-DISCOVERY

Korean Australian singer-songwriter delivers a great introspective indie-pop on her *Misunderstood EP*



By **JAE-HA KIM**

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Hannah Bahng

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Korean Australian singer-songwriter **Hannah Bahng**'s lushly lowkey music combines yearning and heartache with a Gen Z sense that any genre is ready for use, be it melancholy indie-pop or introspective alt-rock. Since debuting last year with her excellent *The Abysmal EP*, she has headlined a sold-out tour and performed at *Rolling Stone's Future of Music Showcase* at SXSW. On Friday, Bahng is releasing her latest collection of self-penned songs, *The Misunderstood EP*. Each of the seven tracks stands on its own merit as a self-reflective tale of vulnerability and longing. But when played straight through, the songs tell a more complex story that begins with desperation and ends with the promise that she will be "Me Again."

“Orchid / Flame” kicks off the EP with a weary Bahng navigating a one-sided relationship: “And I love more than I am loved/...’Cause I was an experience, but you were my everything and more.” Halfway through the song – which she says was originally intended to be two separate tracks – there is a crescendoing piano run that sets up the desperation of being “addicted to your flame.” On “Misunderstood,” Bahng sings in an atmospheric timbre that falls somewhere between Nelly Furtado and Natalie Imbruglia, conveying her disappointment: “Oh it happened again/Now I’m back in the den/Where the lions are men,” she sings. But rather than crying about how she’s been done wrong, she accepts her share of co-dependent responsibility, plaintively singing, “On my knees begging for release/Oh I need you for me.”

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As on her first album, Bahng co-produced *The Misunderstood EP* with Andrew Luce. Lush cellos and mournful piano trills coexist with the overall less-is-more sound. On the hazy, guitar-driven pop-rock song “What Never Lived,” Bahng’s voice veers from smoky to sweet. Tackling the vagueness of dating, she sings, “Out on a Thursday night you called

to say sorry/And like a fool I thought you would change for me.” But that situationship is preferable to the push-pull toxicity that’s taking place in “Sweet Satin Boy,” which leaves her “a shell of my former self.”

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And just when listeners are ready to ride at dawn to avenge that boy, the final three songs offer reprieve. Accompanying herself with subtle guitarwork, she sings of resilience on “RIBS (interlude).” Instead of questioning whether she is enough, Bahng declares, “I don’t wanna talk to you.” She takes it a step further in “raison d’être,” asking, “Who the fuck am I?”

The EP ends with the dreamy “I’m Me Again,” where Bahng knows exactly who she is. “I’m me again, it’s been awhile/I feel again/I’ll be real again/I’ll heal again,” she sings over a hypnotic mashup of strings, synth, and bass. It’s an intimate moment of cathartic self-discovery. By the EP’s end, it’s clear that Bahng isn’t misunderstood. She’s Miss Understood.

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