

LOVE FAME TRAGEDY

Gorillaz. The Postal Service. Gnarls Barkley. Nick Cave and Kylie Minogue. When musicians from differing points on the sonic spectrum collide, magical things can happen; there's a fatalistic creative urge to spin the barrel and see what fires out. And so it was for Matthew 'Murph' Murphy and the array of stellar alt-rock and pop guests that make up his new project Love Fame Tragedy. Relocated away from his Wombats bandmates in LA, from 2016 he found himself collecting songs that didn't seem to fit on The Wombats' Top Three 2017 album 'Beautiful People Will Ruin Your Life' and itching to explore new musical avenues.

"I just wanted to try something new, something that didn't involve any politics," he says. "I don't think it was an ego thing, it was just something I wanted to experience and see how it turned out. I wanted to start a project that's much more brain-to-mouth, so to speak. I think it, I record it, I release it and there's not much bullshit in between those stages, which is how music is leaning now. I wanted to give myself an avenue in which to do that - to collaborate with whoever and do whatever and there be no politics about it."

So when, over the course of 2018, Murph set about recording the batches of songs he'd put aside for his new project with producer Mark Crew (Bastille / Rag'n'Bone Man / The Wombats), he'd play contacts list roulette. While he was recording at 64 Sound in LA "hipsterville" Highland Park, he invited his old touring mate and now golf buddy Joey Santiago from Pixies to pop down after the eighteenth hole and spend a few hours unleashing his sordid swamp rock beast on 'My Cheating Heart' and 'Everything Effects Me Now'. "I tried to put my own spin on it, it was very quick and painless," Joey says. "He pretty much knew what he wanted, when it was good, it was good. He's a very talented man."

Mark Stoermer from The Killers also dropped in to the LA studio to play bass on 'Everything...' while, in London, Gus Unger-Hamilton from Alt-J got the call from One Eyed Jack's studio in South London, where his good friend was looking for striking ambient keyboards add to 'Backflip' and take 'Brand New Brain' in a glitchy future soul direction.

"I've been good friends with Gus since about 2013," says Murph. "He loves to get stuck in with anything - he made that song so exciting for me. It's great to have talented musicians, musicians who have their own niche. When you hear Joey play the guitar you can just tell it's him and the same thing with Gus with the key melodies he chooses and the distinct sound of his voice. It's great to have artists and musicians like that playing on songs of your own because it makes them ten times cooler, at least in your own head. They're not like featured artists. I've got the songs and if a friend's in town who wants to play on them... it's as much of a collaborative thing as it is a band. It's also a good excuse to hang out with people and have a laugh."

As the songs began to snowball - "I found myself really inspired by creating something new," Murph says - he realised he needed a fresh voice. He'd previously written a song for Suki Waterhouse "which I don't think she liked", and heard through the grapevine that Suki's sister Maddi was interested in making music too. "I listened to a couple of her songs and her voice is so soft and cool in that 'Sexy Boy' vein," he says. "I really wanted that on a couple of songs."

Now all Murph needed was a name for the project. And for a concept bordering on the surreal, high art had the answer. "I went to see this Picasso exhibition in the Tate Modern," Murph recalls. "I wouldn't say it was a eureka moment but the whole exhibition really resonated with me. I was after a title for the project that had this looping feeling to it - Love Fame Tragedy [the name of the exhibition] seems like an endless cycle or way of being. It triggered a lot of things and a lot of songs flew out after that."

As intended, Love Fame Tragedy will flow unhindered into the world. One track a month, starting in midsummer, will compile into a debut four-track EP of adventurous, uninhibited alt-pop running the gamut from infectious industrial synth-pop ('My Cheating Heart') to chrome-plated electro-blues ('Backflip') and pure 21st Century pop in 'Pills', a song Murph describes as "a really fucked up Murph version of Robyn's 'Dancing On My Own'. The project has clearly blown wide Murph's musical horizons - he even considers forthcoming track 'Everything Effects Me Now' as "my attempt at Don Henley's 'Boys Of Summer'... I don't think I'd be getting away with that in any other scenario". Yet, at its core, Love Fame Tragedy bears all the hallmarks of Murph's classic synth-pop confessionals, where hedonism, responsibility, anxiety and the fragility of love collide.

'Brand New Brain' finds him losing it in a haze of wild mania ("did I push it to the limit, did I throw a rock at your car?") and, come the regretful dawn, struggling to hold his relationship together: "it's taking it way too far and having to claw your way back into whatever normality there was before... A lot of the songs are trying to make sense of the surrounding world and why I do certain things the way I do them". 'Pills' concerns the comedown hollowness when the drugs - medicinal or recreational - stop working. And 'Backflip' and 'My Cheating Heart' dissect disintegrating relationships; the former a portrait of a dysfunctional affair between the damaged and the lonely ("we're just a poorly-timed backflip"), the latter an autobiographical glance back at Murph's early days of living in America, roaming San Francisco gorging on the Californian "money, women, cars" rock'n'roll lifestyle. "It's looking back on those times with a slight smirk on my face," Murph explains, "and dealing with monogamy as a way of life. Maybe I should write a song about polyamory for a change," he laughs.

Content to work both alone and with the odd friendly musical partner, including Bastille's Dan Smith for the next batch of tracks, who knows who else, or what else, Love Fame Tragedy will involve.

"It was about trying to find as many new ideas and do as many new things as possible," Murph says. "Different feelings and vibes and tempos to songs than I'd normally do, feeling more creative." What follows love, fame and tragedy? We'd bank on success.