Grand Rapids’ Major Murphy is set to release their debut full-length *No. 1* this year. Those who caught feelings for “Mary,” the plaintive single released in November of 2017, may be pleased to find that the single is no outlier in this album. Brimming with jangly guitar, shimmering riffs, synth-sheened grooves, and commanding backing vocals, *No. 1* reimagines 1970s radio rock with bristling sensitivity for our present era. Not quite pastiche, the lyrics of songwriter Jacob Bullard come from millennials’ unique cache of societal anxiety and ego-crises. On one hand, the technicolor and mechanized world of *No. 1* is unmistakably ours: we are over-stimulated and pressured, confused and frustrated. On the other, Bullard heaves up worries seeded in adult selfhood and relationships, working for answers beyond life’s many brief and manic vanities. The album’s musical sensibilities catch all this with A-side’s sudden velocity and mechanical repetitions, and B side’s encouraging grooves and contemplative soft-rock. The sound is rich and evocative, owing in large measure to bassist Jacki Warren’s faculty for harmonic structure. Drummer Brian Voortman’s keen responsiveness to melodic progressions and emotional shifts make for concert-like, energetic recordings--in fact, most of *No. 1* was recorded live, capturing how naturally Major Murphy makes music together.

EPs *Future Release* and *On & Off Again* were demoed and recorded at home around life’s many, ever-shifting details—personal schedules, babysitter availability, practice space needs and changes, and so on. When *Future Release* came out shortly after the band formed in 2015, Bullard remembers telling Warren and Voortman that they have no responsibility to that tape when performing. Their intention together as a band has always focused on what they do live, figuring out what and how they like to play together, rather than “trying to mimic a bedroom recording.” *No. 1* is the culmination of that time and ethos: three years of exploring their musical interests and their natural dynamic. Together, they’re intuitive and involved; Warren quickly memorizing song structures and identifying all possible harmonies to Bullard’s initial guitar and vocals. “She really helps with dynamics of a song, knowing when to apply a root or a 5th in a chord, suspending or solidifying the musical movement,” says Bullard, “She has a great knack for reaching at a rhythmic element of a song too, and not flinching.” Voortman has an acute ability to play off subtle shifts in the melody of a song. “Playing with him on drums, while I'm singing with guitar, I get very fast feedback…If I even lessen or increase my intensity, Brian will respond,” says Bullard. “That is exciting for me because in some ways you never know what will happen, and in my mind, it makes the two of us be ready for anything (playing environment, mood, style) because we can listen.”

When Major Murphy tours, they travel in a light-blue Plymouth Voyager van and make a memorably caring and playful threesome. On stage, they’re a tight and assertive performance. “This album is kind of an experiment,” says Bullard, “We wanted to see what would happen if we recorded in a studio instead of at home. We wanted to extend the idea of capturing our live dynamic a little further.” The result is an album that holds the kinetic charge of these three musicians. With precise control and live versatility, they never quite let the tension out. Even their dreamy soft-rock tracks have moments that feel utterly urgent, as if something dear were at stake. And isn’t there? Major Murphy’s *No. 1* releases via Winspear on March 30, 2018.

-Michelle Gottschlich