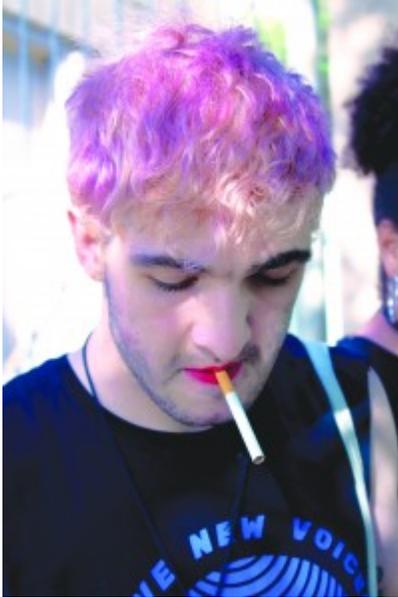


Honest Lies: Ilyus talks about getting to the truth through her poetry



“When I was 14, my therapist told me that I should write a poem about my feelings and immediately I was like, ‘Absolutely not.’ Eventually I did it, and I was like, ‘Oh, this is just therapy that doesn’t cost me an hourly rate.’ So I stopped going to therapy and just started writing poems instead.”

Ilyus Evander is a 23-year-old poet from Coventry, Rhode Island. I first met Ilyus five years ago at a poetry workshop in New Urban Arts. After doing some freewriting, Ilyus volunteered to share what they wrote, and I’ll never forget the way their words made me feel. I thought Ilyus must have been some big-shot poet around town, but I was completely wrong. Ilyus was as new to the scene as I was, but her words were of someone who had been doing poetry their whole life. This was five years ago, but Ilyus today remains humble and unaware of the talent they possess.

Like many Providence poets, Ilyus found their way into the slam poetry scene through Providence Slam at As220. Providence Slam, more commonly known as ProvSlam, is an open mic and slam poetry event that takes place every first and third Thursday of the month at As220. “I didn’t know ProvSlam existed,” said Ilyus. “I was walking to go hang out with my friend and there was the A-frame outside that said Providence Poetry Slam. I called my friend and was like, ‘Hey listen, I’m two minutes away, but also I’m not coming.’”

From there, Ilyus went on to be part of the 2014 youth slam poetry team, representing Providence at the international youth poetry slam, Brave New Voices. “My team as a unit introduced me to the idea of a chosen family. When I first came out as queer, my [biological] family was just not about it. Providence Poetry Slam immediately was like, ‘That’s my child now.’ ProvSlam essentially raised me in my queerhood.”

Ilyus was brought up in a born-again Christian household. When she first started writing, most of her poems tackled gender and the feelings behind existing in a space where you’re not accepted or understood. Ilyus said that throughout the years, she used “poems as a tool to explore” herself.

"I really love poetry because I can dig at my feelings and my identity without ever actually talking about my feelings or my identity. I can pick an object image or metaphor to represent what I'm thinking or feeling, and manipulate that instead." For Ilyus, the art of manipulating an object in lieu of herself is an act of protection. It gives her the distance she needs to talk about a potentially painful topic, without putting herself in jeopardy. "I never really include me in my images. I talk a lot about other people directly. But I'm always a thing and not me, and that is like my safe space. To me, poetry means honesty through lies. Poetry is where I'm the most vulnerable, but also the most distant."

Ilyus has started writing about things "other than gender." She's tackled her battle with mental illness and the relationship she has acquired with the mental health industry. She's in the midst of a project that stabs "at the [mental health] industry and how they treat us in a way that keeps us sick so they can keep draining money." Ilyus is also working on a book titled, *Heavier Than Wait*.

"Wait is that stretch of time where you know something is coming, but it's not here yet and that's all you can think about. In the book, wait is death. The idea that death is inevitable, and we're all just waiting for it to happen, is the heaviest thought I can think of," she said of her book.

In her book, Ilyus also talks of the weight of other emotions. "Heaviness is or can be described as anything that is a lot of something," said Ilyus. "So anything can be heavy. There's such a thing as heavy joy. Like yeah, I'm super fucking happy, but it's also really overwhelming how happy I am right now."

Ilyus is starting a new chapter of life by relocating to Boston, and is reminiscing about all the things the Providence poetry scene has taught her. "Providence taught me everything I know about poetry, slam and myself. Providence taught me what writing and image is. Providence taught me what manipulating that image is. Providence taught me how to love teaching more than I love poetry." Not only has poetry made Ilyus realize her love for teaching, but it has helped her realize her purpose in life, too. "My mission in life is to bring people as much joy and success as possible, but it's really a selfish motive because that makes me feel happy too."

Ilyus said she spends a lot of time "thinking about love languages, about how people are capable of both giving and receiving love and how sometimes they don't look the same. I consider myself a mother first and foremost, and learning how to care about other people in a way that they're comfortable with is what I think motherhood is."

Ilyus is touring for her upcoming book, Heavier Than Wait, which she hopes to have finished by the end of the year. You can see her featuring at Emerson College on March 25 or participate in the workshop she's leading in Allston on April 1. If you will like to contact Ilyus for features, workshops or discussions, you can reach her on Facebook at Ilyus Evander Poetry.

[You Know It, Poet! Local poet Jay Walker](#)

rereleased three books of poetry



Jay Walker at the Feb 16, 2019, re-release of his three books of collected poems, Stillwater Books, Pawtucket, RI. (Photo: Michael Bilow)

Being a poet is not easy; publishing a body of work is even harder. But it's a challenge Jay Walker, who is not new to the poetry scene, is up for. With three books to his name, he's starting off the new year by republishing them and he celebrated their rerelease with a reading and book signing at Stillwater Books on February 16.

Walker's love for poetry started during his college career at RIC. "I found a poetry reading on campus and the people there introduced me to the different poetry readings in the city," he said. He got involved with Providence Poetry Slam, which he said combined everything he "loves about writing, and performing in one thing."



Jay Walker at the Feb 16, 2019, re-release of his three books of collected poems, Stillwater Books, Pawtucket, RI. (Photo: Michael Bilow)

In 2009, Walker got the opportunity to publish his first book: *Sifting Through The Ashes of Me*. His

second and third books, *Where I'm Comin' From* and *Flower*, were released in 2011 and 2012. Of the three, Walker says *Flower* is his favorite due to the title piece. "The message is a pretty powerful one about holding on," he said. "There was a time where I forgot that message. We're all human, we all make mistakes, and there was a time where I didn't feel my worth and took action against myself. When I recovered from that, I just started writing all the negativity out."



Jay Walker at the Feb 16, 2019, re-release of his three books of collected poems, Stillwater Books, Pawtucket, RI. (Photo: Michael Bilow)

Although Walker's writing skills have grown during his poetic journey, he says his writing habits have stayed quite the same. When I asked him about the hardest part of writing a book of poetry, he said, "I don't really think any part of it was hard, because I was writing it a piece at a time. I slaved over one piece, and then put it aside and slaved over another. Then after I accumulated a bunch of pieces I decided what would go in the book and what would not." He found focusing on each piece individually, instead of writing for a finished product was the easiest way [for him] to get it done. Jay also said he kept in mind that, "Not everyone is born good, you develop skill over time, so it's okay to suck at first."

*You can purchase *Sifting Through The Ashes of Me*, *Where I'm Comin' From*, and *Flower*, online on Amazon, at Barnes and Noble, or Stillwater Books.*

Untitled

Your body next to mine,

Stiff as a board,

With the dorm room twin bed keeping us together like peanutbutterandjelly,
The moment childlike just as such.

This is the way I remember you most,
all curly hair and selfish
taking up space, and the only ray of sun that's peaking through the curtains is hitting your face.

Here, you are more present than you'll ever be.

Here, I found out the difficulty of sleeping next to someone who sleeps just like you.

We are human starfishes, laying on tummies like tired dogs.

Every sleep is treated as if we have a long day ahead, and even if we don't we do.

That's how love is like when you're young,

Exhausting and

If it doesn't smell like something that reminds you of your childhood then

It smells like coconut oil, and I remember looking away as you rubbed it on my sex as if you was a parent and I was a baby with a diaper rash and what I mean is,

I never had a man fuck me tender.

To care about pain as much as he cares about enjoying,

Entering me all nimble like,

smooth like,

butter,

a hand slippery with palm grasping at a neck turning moans in to whimpers.

Fingernails leaving tally marks of each passing minute on your back,

Before we collapse into each other remembering there's so much more world than what's right here, right now, so we sit and listen to it.

This is how I remember you.

Stuck to me like peanut butter on the roof of a mouth.

Breathing heavily and regretful, with sun making the oil on your body glisten regally.

What do you do with a love like this?

One that makes you weep from beauty?

One so mesmerizing you have to tell the world about it?

One that wakes you up at 7 am to count your lovers eye lashes?

What do you do?

When you try to imitate this with every person you meet?

[It's Hot in Here!](#)

Global warming was brought up more than ever this year, and that's because the effects of it are quickly unfolding. This year was just weird. We've had a multitude of floods, hurricanes and volcanic eruptions, but I don't think it hit that these disasters were not so natural until we heard it directly from

the experts.

On October 8, a report from the [United Nations](#) claimed if we don't start making critical changes toward reducing carbon dioxide emissions and greenhouse gases, Earth will be facing irreversible catastrophic changes in as few as 12 years.

The Earth's temperature has risen 1 degree Celsius since the 19th century. If it increases another half to 1 degree Celsius, the disasters we will experience will make these past ones look like nothing. They could leave millions displaced, and deadly weather events could become commonplace. Although not everyone may believe in global warming or our influence in it, 97% or more of actively publishing climate scientists agree: "[Climate-warming](#) trends over the past century are extremely likely due to human activities."

Knowing that we have this much of an influence on the Earth should encourage us to make better environmental decisions. Although this huge problem will take more than one individual to manage, and major corporations have the most work to do, your end-of-year reflections should include what you've done to contribute to climate change, and your New Year's resolutions should include reducing your carbon footprint. So how can you reduce your carbon footprint?

Eat Less Meat!

The meat industry - particularly red meat and dairy - is one of the main contributors to greenhouse gas emission because of the large amount of **fossil fuels used in meat production**. Eating more veggies is not only healthy for you, but it's also healthy for the planet. If we were to all go meatless once or twice a week it would have a huge impact on the planet.

Drive Less!

Carpooling and using public transit are little ways to reduce our carbon footprint throughout the week. Biking has also become more mainstream; by biking you can look cool and save the planet simultaneously.

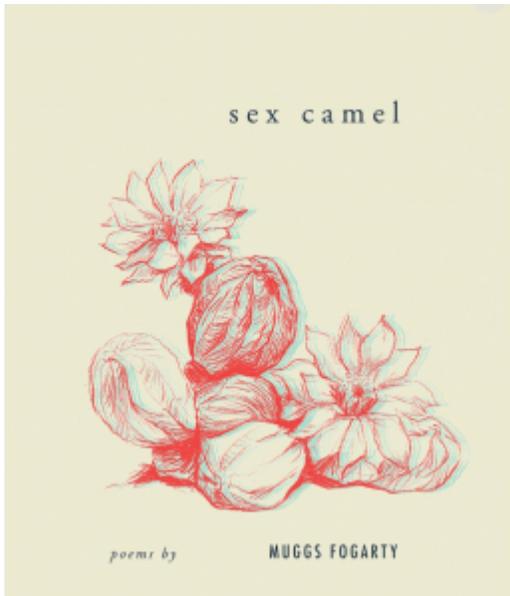
Go Organic, Shop Local!

Fast fashion is a huge polluter. And so are the pesticides sprayed on crops and the amount of fuel used to transport fruits and vegetables. We have to stop supporting the same corporations that are killing us. So, minimize your fast fashion shopping, and when you can, shop organic and local!

For more information on how to reduce your carbon footprint, check out: cotap.org/reduce-carbon-footprint

Kleo Sincere is a Motif intern and student at The Met School.

Been a While: Sex Camel is pillow talk for modern lovers



Muggs Fogarty tackles not only the subject of sex, but all the complications and emotions that come with it in their book *Sex Camel*. With only 10 poems, Fogarty takes readers through the notions of their experience; exploring how multilayered sex can be, showing that it's more than just doing it. Fogarty paints a picture of the before, the during and the after — and all the thoughts that accompany those moments.

“What’s the desert? Slow-drip-time./The swipe right. Pillow-talk-texts for months/ and months, sore thumbed, untouched.” This felt like something I could have written. I, too, have fallen victim to the countless hours of Tinder’s swipe right.

A sexual dry spell is something many of us encounter, yet refrain from speaking about as a way to conserve dignity. Yet Fogarty’s way of speaking of this scarcity feels like a sort of solidarity — as if this poem is a conversation between two friends.

“Anyway/ a sex camel is someone who can go a long time without having sex.”

Fogarty is honest about their relationship with sex and its ever changing definition, often dependent on conditions of life.

“Often when I’m looking to feel better I end up on my back -- Even when I don’t pay for it I pay for it. Anything can be a desert if that’s where you’re at”

This whole book feels like a confession. Some pages read like whispering: soft, quiet and tender. Like the story being told is still raw and being processed.

“I think there is no such thing but/time is the mistress of forgetting.”

These poems feel like words that Fogarty needed to say to themselves. Things we all might need to say to

ourselves. The book's touch is a healing that many of us didn't know we needed. Fogarty communicates with integrity their relationships with some of the most vulnerable aspects of living. *Sex Camel* is not about sex, but about life — the catastrophes, the beautiful little moments and the times of ailing and how sometimes they can all lead you.

Sex Camel is available at Ada Books, Riff Raff or online at gameoverbooks.com. You can listen to the latest track by Fogarty's Sweetpea Pumpkin, 'Scorpion Tape #3', online on bandcamp and the newest EP, 'Mirage', by LOOKERS on Youtube and Spotify.

In My City

February 14: My professor rushes into class, telling us that there has been a school shooting in Florida, and I get alerted on my phone that there are 17 confirmed casualties, 16 wounded in Parkland, Florida.

Since then, I attended March For Our Lives in Washington, DC, in March, and before that, I attended National Walkout Day in my city. As my peers and I marched to the state house that day, two of them stopped and looked at each other. "Do you hear that?" one of them said, and the other just smiled. I stared at them, puzzled, and continued walking, until I heard it, too: a mass of students, marching and shouting, "Ain't no power like the power of people cause the power of people don't stop!" We joined the group in our march to the state house. There I heard students and people my age talk about police gun violence and talk about the gun violence that occurs in my own neighborhood. Only a month after tragedy, I hadn't yet digested the incident and what it meant. I knew I felt myriad emotions, but I didn't really think about how this was affecting me or anyone else around me. I just knew something had to change, without knowing exactly *what* had to change, and since then I've had a lot to consider.

- On January 1, a 23-year-old man was shot inside of a house on Unit Street in Providence.
- On January 15, a 19-year-old boy was shot in Providence Place Mall.
- On Sunday, January 21, there was a drive-by shooting on Broad Street.
- On Monday, a 33-year-old man was shot in the leg on Manton Avenue.
- On Tuesday, a man was shot and killed on Michigan Avenue.
- On Wednesday, there was a shooting on Sayles and Harriet Streets in South Providence.
- On Wednesday night, a 15-year-old boy was shot in the face off Cranston Street.

I had heard of none of these incidents, and the majority of them took place in the same neighborhood where I live and go to school. Providence Police Chief Col. Hugh Clements reported that in January alone, there were nine shootings in Providence, two resulting in death, all of which had been quickly swept away by the media. One shooting gets lost in another, then vanishes. Why is it that no one cares about these neighborhoods and the people in them? Why is it that when someone is shot in these communities - all of which are urban or predominantly black - there is no uproar? Is this because the victims are seen as nothing more than a product of their environment — an environment that no one - except the people living there - cares about? Is this because of the neighborhood's demographic? I don't have the answers to these questions, but I do know that gun violence happens every day, and it seems that gun reform is only mentioned when it's happening in suburban, primarily white, neighborhoods.

On our way to March For Our Lives, I told my principal, "I hope they do this right." She asked me what I meant, and I said "I hope that they acknowledge that this didn't start with Parkland, that black and brown kids have been victims of and fighting against gun violence for years."

March For Our Lives brought many people of color to talk about the way their lives have been affected by gun violence. They had young people of color from all around the country come to the march to speak. Jaclyn Corin, a survivor of the Parkland shooting, acknowledged in her speech that their affluence and privilege is what got them so far in their activism, which is why they are sharing the stage "[today and forever with those who have always stared down the barrel of a gun.](#)" As I marched, and I listened to the words that my fellow marchers had to say, I thought to myself, "They did this right." They included voices and stories from people all over and acknowledged their privilege. But now, as I sit and reflect two months later, I'm not sure what I think.

Eleven percent of Marjory Stoneman Douglas' student body is black, yet the face of the tragedy doesn't show this. The *NeverAgainMSD* organization doesn't include a single black member. This prompted a few black students who attend Stoneman Douglas to call a press conference to ensure that their peers are practicing what they preach about inclusivity and respecting all narratives. "[We feel like people within the movement definitely addressed racial disparity, but haven't adequately taken action to counteract that racial disparity,](#)" said Tyah-Amoy Roberts. Mei-Ling Ho-Shing, another black student, talks of how, after addressing this issue with them, Emma Gonzalez reached out and invited her to meetings, yet never followed up with a time or location. It seems as though the leaders of the movement got so caught up in the bigger picture that they failed to realize change starts in your own backyard. "They've been saying but they haven't been doing," said Roberts.

In addition, some students fear that their concerns aren't the same as those of their white counterparts. While some students may take comfort from having more police in schools, others may not. "Black students will face most of the consequences of an over-militarized, predominately white school," said Kai, a black student at Stoneman Douglas. After February 14, police presence has increased at Stoneman Douglas.

["Youth activism didn't start with Parkland... The Black Lives Matter movement has been addressing this topic since the murder of Trayvon Martin, since 2012."](#) said students at the Stoneman Douglas press conference. The abuse of guns by the police force also has been unaddressed in this movement. The gun control laws that are being pushed need to include gun abuse and the voices of the people affected by it. Despite Black Lives Matter and March for Our Lives intersecting and having the same end goals, one is getting more attention and support than the other. One narrative and only one part of the problem is being discussed.

After hearing the kids in my city speak of the unaddressed gun violence that happens every day and hearing the black kids of Parkland speak of being affected not only by school shootings, but by gun violence within their community and by the police, I began to see faults. I began to re-evaluate March For Our Lives and what the organizers of *NeverAgainMSD* was asking for and who was asking. Gun violence that happens on a large scale is most talked about in this conversation, but not the violence that happens every day or the gun violence being committed by police.

The people at the forefront of *NeverAgainMSD* don't experience this type of everyday violence, and although they brought speakers in from other states, they forgot to include the voices of those from surrounding neighborhoods. They forgot to include the voices of people who have been victims of gun

violence by police. Most importantly, they forgot about the ones that they see every day at school; the ones who were also affected by this tragedy, and other forms of gun violence, more often than the leaders of this movement are. [“It hurts, because they went all the way to Chicago to hear these voices when we’re right here,”](#) said Ho-Shing at the student press conference.

The movement is lacking black people. It’s lacking voices of those who are constant victims of gun violence – in their neighborhoods, schools, and at the hands of police. And because it lacks those voices, the problem in their communities will continue to be swept under the rug and won’t be the acknowledged in this conversation.

I’m not trying to chastise NeverAgainMSD or what they are working for, I’m simply pointing out that there are areas of improvement in this mission to achieve gun reform. I’m acknowledging that black folks and other people of color who have been talking, marching and protesting for gun violence and control for years aren’t being heard the way the Parkland students, or more specifically the non-black Parkland students, are. The conversation, whether initiated by black/POC or white/non-black people is the same. A march, whether being conducted by NeverAgainMSD or Black Lives Matter is asking for the same thing, just by different people. They both deserve to get the same attention and all of the voices deserve to be heard.

[An Interview with Cover Artist Zack Deus](#)

Though most people would consider music a performance art, when the right visual artist comes along, you can see how music can transcend boundaries and provoke feelings through other senses than hearing. For this issue we asked graphic/web designer and photographer Zack Deus to capture this idea for the cover of our Motif Music Awards Nominations issue. I spoke with Deus about his artistic abilities, his inspiration for this cover and the process he used to create it.

Kleo Sincere (*Motif*): How long have you been [formally] making art? Did you go to school for it? How did you get introduced? When did you begin?

Zack Deus: I think the story goes that around third grade my art teacher called my parents from the school and asked them to come in for a meeting. Originally thinking that I was in trouble for something, they were pretty surprised when she suggested enrolling me in private art lessons. From there, I took private lessons for about six years until early high school. In high school I continued to pursue drawing and painting primarily; I interned for my art teacher in my senior year and won a Golden Key award through Scholastic Arts. That same year I also started learning graphic design and screen printing and realized how fun all of that was, and that I might be able to make a more practical career out of that. After high school, along with a business partner, we released our first tee shirt design under the clothing brand (*SOSICO*.) and then later that fall, I enrolled in New England Tech to pursue a degree in graphics, multimedia and web design. Following the completion of my degree, I started my career as a graphic designer and held numerous jobs, but in August of 2016, inevitably went out on my own as a freelancer and continued focusing on my clothing brand. I haven’t looked back since, and I hope that I never do. I get to design clothing and work on cool, creative projects every day and hopefully, for the

rest of my life.

KS: In which medium have you been working the longest?

ZD: I used to draw birds a lot. My great grandmother had an old yellow-covered bird watching book that I somehow acquired. I would draw all of the birds in it, not because I even cared about the birds themselves, but because they were just interesting in their unique shapes and dimensions of each species. Aside from coloring within the lines, I think this was my first artistic venture as a child... I've been drawing and painting longer than anything else. Although I unfortunately don't have too much time to do that very often since I'm focused more on the digital side of things now. As a basis, I try to start everything on paper though because there are no limitations. I may not create a full and final work of art completely on canvas or paper nowadays, but pretty much everything I do starts that way. Logos, websites, illustrations and even tee shirt graphics all start as a rough sketch and develop from there. I'm thankful to have a very solid background in fine art because I think that it makes me a better designer and photographer. Understanding light from a very young age and how it affects a subject is key to almost any visual art.

KS: What motivates/inspires you when you shoot or design for leisure and not work?

ZD: Everything — as a broad and uninteresting answer. More specifically, I usually have an end goal in mind for whatever I do — a statement. I pretty much know what I want the final outcome of something to look like, and from there, I start to analyze and predict the different scenarios of how the viewer might receive it. I like practicality and purpose; I want something to give someone a reaction, I want it to do something other than just physically exist. By creating art under those semi-strict personal guidelines, I am in fact creating for my own leisure in a very backward sort of way.

KS: What inspired your design for the cover of this issue?

ZD: *Alice in Wonderland*. Jimi Hendrix. '90s cartoons. Shel Silverstein. And Maurice Sendak.

KS: What did the process for making this cover look like?

ZD: I started off with the brief and combined it with my ideas / interpretation for the initial concept, then made some rough placement sketches for everything. Outlining the shapes of which buildings would be doing what. From there, I created a mood board and pulled some reference photos to work from. After that,, I re-sketched the outlines in Photoshop using a Wacom tablet, trying to keep everything imperfect and hand-drawn looking. From there it was just a matter of coloring everything in and using a few layering effects.

KS: How would you describe your style?

ZD: I'm honestly not even sure if I have a style. I've always wished that I did. I think that with design at least, I tend to just emulate what I like and take out what I don't like. I have a pretty clear concept or idea that drives most of my work, all within the minimalism realm — or less is more approach — but at the same time I apply that very loosely. "Good artists copy; great artists steal" — I like to take that into consideration with everything I do and almost work backward sometimes. I start with something I like, even if it's just a solid concept or a mood board, and then work backward and start taking things out or changing the original idea until I cover my tracks enough to have an original piece that nobody could really completely trace back to anything except for me.

KS: Any tips and things to be aware of to aspiring artists who want to get into your field(s)?

ZD: Stay true to you, never compromise your integrity for a paycheck. If you want something bad enough, you'll find a way to make it happen. Perfect your craft and let your work speak. Most importantly, surround yourself with good people and only good things will come. You will make it far on your own, but you will make it much further with the right people in your corner.

If you like the cover as much as we do, you can find Zack Deus at his shop, *The SOSICO*, located at 751 Main Street in West Warwick. He offers graphic/web design, bookings for photography and print services, and is open Monday through Saturday. You can also contact him through his website: zackdeus.com.

[An Interview with Storm Ford](#)

As I sit in the recording studio of New Urban Arts a cacophony fills the small room filled with about five people all playing different instruments, all different tempos, humming to themselves songs that don't exist yet. Among these people sits Storm Ford. She sits in the middle of the room, stringing her guitar, singing; quietly, at first, but gradually growing louder. Soon her voice fills the room, overpowering every other sound. Everyone shifts and plays in harmony to the song she's singing. I sit in awe, never before seeing someone command a room the way she does. Prior to this, I had heard and been introduced to her talents, but seeing it in person was something different, something special.

On February 14, 18-year-old Storm Ford released her long-awaited debut project, *Highest Mountain*. In this 10-track, neo-soul/R&B EP, she tackles subjects of family, intimacy, relationships and self discovery, but most importantly: personal growth. I recently had the privilege of sitting down to talk with Storm about her music and how *Highest Mountain* came to be.

Kleo Sincere (Motif): How long have you been writing music?

Storm Ford: I've been writing music since I was 14. I started playing guitar when I was 12, and I've written poetry since I was in fourth grade. When I started taking lessons, I kind of started putting my words into songs, but I didn't write my first song until I moved back to Rhode Island for my sophomore year in 2015.

When I was 14, I actually had something to say. The only reason why I ever wrote was because I couldn't keep it to myself anymore, and I didn't really know how else to say it. Like when you just talk to people they don't really care, but when you put it to a some dope ass chords and a nice beat they'll be like, "Oh shit, let me take the time to listen to this!"

KS: What made you continue? You started playing guitar and was you like, "This is dope" and that's it? What made you stick to it?

SF: I always been really into the arts, whether it was like painting with watercolor or dancing on the step team, even like writing short novels. I've always been into that. I never was like, "Oh, I want to be

a famous singer," or anything, but when *Dream Girls* came out in 2006, my grandma, who was raising me at the time, wouldn't let me see it because it was PG13 or something. So my aunt got me the soundtrack and I listened to it everyday, and I kind of just took certain textures, or different riffs and stylistic things from Jennifer Hudson's voice or Beyonce's voice until I created my own style. And I'm still sort of doing that along the way, you know?

I didn't sing in front of anyone, though. I didn't sing in front of a crowd until I was 14, I sung the national anthem. That was like 600 people. And then I sang "All I Want For Christmas." The response that I got from the crowd when I was hitting certain notes, I liked the way it felt. I was like, "Maybe I should focus on this for a little bit."

KS: Do you write all your music? Do you produce it?

SF: Yeah I wrote all of them. They all started out as poems. If you hear my music, if you're really into music, you'll know that some of the chords I use are not popular in today's music. I produced it, but Tom at New Urban Arts (NUA) mastered it, but I was there through every second of that. "Notes need to sound like this." "That needs to go here." "This needs to be stacked on top of this." Except for "Stormy Day;" I wrote those lyrics in 10 minutes, and I came to NUA and Isaiah; he was playing this funky chord progression, and then Tom came in and Daniel was there and they were just going off! I started singing the song, and I was like, "Oh shit! This shit bangs!" So we started to record live.

KS: What significance do the interludes/skits hold to you? Do you feel as though your EP would be the same without them? Would you have released the project without them?

SF: I honestly believe that they're necessary; this whole album is my diary. I felt like those three tracks. They wouldn't have meant as much if they had chords distracting you from them. All of those poems are about growth. You can hear it throughout all of them. And I feel like they tell their own story and they're all milestones in the whole process of writing this album.

KS: So if you didn't have those you don't think that it would be complete?

SF: No. You wouldn't have known the whole story.

KS: I see that the theme throughout the EP is that you start out with a dilemma and by then end you're like, "I'm this bitch." In "Notes to Noi," you start off with "Do I matter?" and you end the song with, "I matter." Was this intended? Or is that just how it planned out by the end of you making the EP.

SF: The whole album tells a story. It's not in order, but I think once you listen to it you know what I've gone through. Or I hope you realize, whoever the listener is, what you felt. Even if you can't put your tongue on it. For *Notes to Noi*, originally the first round of the chorus was, "Do I matter?" These songs have evolved so much that, by the time I started recording it I was like, "Oh shit! I do matter! Like, 'No sis, I'm good. I don't need to know! Cause I matter.'" You know? "Notes to Noi" is about my mother. I wrote that when I moved back to Rhode Island just because it didn't mean anything to her that I was back. So I feel like I was like, at first, I'd call it melancholy and then I realized that those feelings were coming from her neglect. So I wrote that for her. It [the growth] just came.

KS: You said you started this project when you were 14, right? Which song is the oldest?

SF: "Highest Mountain." It's the second song I ever wrote.

KS: So what's the meaning of "Highest Mountain?"

SF: "Highest Mountain" is a movement, and it's a metaphor for any misfortune or obstacle or heartbreak, heartache or anything that's your mountain and it makes it seem more likely that you will get over it. In the album, you hear me get over my mountains, whether it's an ex, or my mother, or my father or even myself. But a mountain can be, being unemployed for four months but you want to save up for this big thing. You know? Whatever you're dealing with at the time. In my upcoming documentary *To The Summit*, I'm asking a bunch of artists and peers and mentors and friends and family what their mountains are and how they get over them and I just hope that I can convey how music is really important and just as important as perseverance as it manifests in my life.

KS: When will the documentary come out?

SF: In the beginning of June, right before my next album release! My next release is on [my] graduation day. It's going to be four trapsoul songs. We don't have the title yet, but we have the cover and we have the music! I feel like there's a lot of pressure. I want to prove to people I can take over more than one genre. I feel like this album [Highest Mountain] is really sad. You have to be in your feelings with your headphones in to listen to it, but I want to make something people can bop to!

KS: How did you feel after you finished *Highest Mountain*?

SF: At first, I was like, "I don't wanna hear these songs," because I've heard these songs over and over again over the last five months. Or the last four years, I guess you could say. I think it hit four days after. I was just sitting home and I put my headphones in and I listened to it from beginning to finish and I cried because. Like "Notes to Noi." My question never got answered. Do I matter? Yes I know I matter, but I don't know if I ever cross her mind from time to time. You know? I was at the summit once I finished the album, but I was just wondering if I was going to make my way down. It's like pouring a full glass of water into another full glass of water. Just feeling overwhelmed and I felt really vulnerable because the things that I held back for four years were finally out there after four years whether people received them or not.

This will definitely not be the last you see of Storm Ford. *Highest Mountain* is a captivating body of work that forces you to confront the depths of emotion. You can find it on all streaming services. Be on the lookout for Storm's follow-up documentary, *To The Summit*, and her next body of work, both of which will be coming out in June!

God Is Not A Black Woman

On December 12, 2017, during the Alabama Senate elections, Roy Moore — who was close to losing — stated on video that "God is always in control," as he refused to concede. The next day, as the election results determined Doug Jones' win, we learned that 98% of his voters were black women. J.K. Rowling responded to the video of Moore via Twitter, writing: "Narrator's Voice: Roy was right. God was in

control. What he didn't realize was, She's black."

Many other liberals, or should I say, *white* liberals, joined Rowling with posts stating how God is a black woman or how black women will apparently be the ones to save us all. As a black woman myself, I want to say that it isn't our job to save you, and we certainly are not your god — nor do we want to be.

Since the beginning of time, black women have had many stereotypical tropes placed on them, the most prevalent ones being: The Strong/Independent Black Woman, The Angry Black Woman, The Hypersexual Jezebel and lastly, The Mammy, which is most relevant in this case. These themes in media perpetuate a disregard of the suffering black women have endured and the invalidation of our feelings, and continue to reduce us to only these archetypes. A mammy was a female slave whose designated tasks were to care for her masters' children and do the housekeeping. As the mammy image made its way into the 20th century, she began to be portrayed as an older, overweight, dark-skinned woman, who was loyal to her employers and their children. She'd work long hours and often put her work before herself and even her own family and was *happily* willing to do so (think of Calpurnia in *To Kill a Mockingbird* or Mammy in *Gone With The Wind*). This new portrayal of black women is nothing more than a glorified mammy image. Though we are being portrayed as something that seems to be good and nurturing, this image maintains ignorance of the suffering we go through. From slavery through current years, the mammy image has served to convey the message that black women are nothing more than faithful maternal figures who will continue to put everyone before themselves and take on the responsibilities of their white counterparts.

People use God to alleviate one's conscience after wrongdoings and sin. Putting black women at the center of this practice continues the lack of accountability of white people and the disregard of what encompasses having a symbol forced on you.

The notion of god(s) being black women has also been the center of many Afrocentric religions and has helped liberate black people - and continues to, beyond the "end" of the institution of slavery. Afrocentric religions were taken away and forcibly replaced by Christianity as a means of control, and now taking that symbol away, *again*, feels patronizing. The sudden embrace of the black matriarchal figure is a slap in the face to black women and to those who've had to evolve from these traumatic histories. It's also interesting that society refuses to acknowledge Jesus' blackness, yet is quick to say God is a black woman in the event of black women doing something beneficial. White patriarchy has been the Pontius Pilate in the crucifixion of black women.

Black women have been the pillars of black communities since the beginning of time, and we're not looking forward to being the rock of yet another community that fails to support and continues to neglect us. Patrisse Cullors, Opal Tometi and Alicia Garza are the founders of the [Black Lives Matter movement](#), yet you rarely see the deaths of black women go viral. According to the National Crime Information Center, there were 170,899 black children reported missing in 2016. The majority of those were girls, yet there was little to no coverage, few answers and no light shown on these statistics. According to Mic Data, the average annual murder rate for white Americans between 15 and 34 is about one in 12,000, but for black transgender women in the same age group, the rate rises to one in 2,600 — another statistic that no one seems to acknowledge. Also generally unacknowledged: Black women are three times more **likely** to die during/after childbirth.

White women are quick to exploit the image of black women, but refuse to practice intersectional feminism and refuse to acknowledge the hardships of having to deal not only with misogyny but also

with systemic racism and at times, homophobia/transphobia too.

The image of God as a black woman does nothing but tokenize black women for political gain while failing to help them. It accomplishes nothing more than sustainable resistance in this political era. God is a black woman until that black woman is a single mother. Until that black woman is mentally ill or is queer. Or is missing or is homeless. God is only a black woman when she's helping everyone, but no one's helping her.

Black women voted for Doug Jones because Roy Moore is an (alleged) rapist. We voted for Jones because we knew that if we didn't vote ourselves, we couldn't rely on white women to make the right decision for us or even the right decision for women in general (considering that 53% of white women voted for Trump). We know the only people who look out for us, is us. The truth is we didn't vote for Jones for anyone but ourselves.