**Mabel - ‘About Last Night’**

Conceived as the world went into lockdown – and released as life IRL picks up pace – ‘About Last Night...’ is a vivid and hyperreal journey from the anticipated beginning to the messy end of the best night out that never was. On this, her hugely anticipated second album, Mabel once again switches up her effortless way with modern pop. Influences span the sweaty and liberated euphoria of noughties club-culture, with elements of house, disco, trance, and R&B. With physical dancefloors locked down and her own world in turmoil, Mabel created an emotional space that (in her own words) “brought her back to life” – here is a fiercely intelligent young woman processing her own, life-changing formative few years growing up in the public eye, and imagining a fantastical world full of positivity and self-affirmation.

This feel-good blueprint was conceived both IRL and remotely between Mabel’s west London family home, Angelic studios in Oxford and some of Los Angeles' most inspiring creative spaces, including the former hilltop residence of Frank Sinatra. After sketching ideas on the piano in her home studio, Mabel began to assemble a collective of creatively alignedcollaborators including friends and frequent songwriting partners Raye (Charli XCX, Beyoncé), MNEK (Madonna), Kamille (Dua Lipa, Little Mix) and Steve Mac (Ed Sheeran). Also joining were chart-topping producer and songwriter Jax Jones, Jordan Riley (Tom Grennan) and Tre Jean-Marie (Burna Boy). Impressed by his work with Robyn on *Impact*, Mabel also invitedSG Lewis to Oxford, before traveling to LA for final finessing with heavy hitters from pop’s top-table: Stargate (Rihanna, Katy Perry); Tommy Brown (Ariana Grande, Victoria Monet); Jozzy (Beyoncé, Lil Nas X) and Aldae (Justin Bieber).

The genesis of ‘About Last Night...’ began during lockdown as Mabel avidly watched and re-watched ‘Paris Is Burning’, ‘Pose’ and ‘Drag Race'. She began to think about the dancefloor as a safe space for creativity, a home for expression and freedom. Having been bought up in a household frequented by some of the leading luminaries of queer culture – stylist Judy Blame and original Buffalo boy Ray Petri to name but two – Mabel wanted her new record to reflect on the club as a historical haven for the marginalised. “I’ve been surrounded by the most amazing people since I was a kid, people who celebrated being different, who, like those in my favourite shows, turned rejection into the most beautiful and brilliant art,” Mabel says. “I wouldn’t be who I am without Judy. I wanted to pay tribute to that energy and write something that was deliberately over-confident for me, but came from a place of being vulnerable.”

The result is a superbly self-assured album set across one night. Each track transports the minutiae of a night out – getting ready; feeling invincible; clocking an ex; crying in the bathroom; stumbling home – and transforms normality into the magical. Even its open-ended title, ‘About Last Night…’, appears as a female-fronted ellipsis: there’s the hedonistic haze of the after-hours, but also the sense of an autonomous woman in charge of her own narrative. “I want to inspire people to control the room, and to tell their own stories. Especially as a female, we’re told that to please a man we need to be pretty, funny, sexy, but not too-sexy; god forbid a man might think you’re dominant. Right now, I am really unapologetic about who I am, and I want the world of this album to feel like one space with different rooms. Embrace your wild side, let go of the idea of perfection, and be unafraid.”

The record opens with ***Animal***, an ebullient expression of self-confidence. Produced by Jordan Riley and co-produced by Raye, the gorgeously charismatic strings recall Mabel’s Swedish roots of ABBA (as well as an influence of Britney) while she lets out, she grins, “my dominant side.” It’s a theme exploded on first single ***Let Them Know,*** a homage to New York ballrooms (and Madonna’s *Vogue*) which Mabel teased when returning to the UK festival circuit last summer and work continued on the album. The deceptively titled ***Shy*** is an assertive expression of self-belief produced by Tre Jean-Marie and MNEK and co-produced by Tommy Brown and Anton Göransson. The album’s midpoint, meanwhile, is the gloriously euphoric ***Let Love Go*:** an anthemic affirmation that shrugs off heartache and relationships which “don’t give you what you deserve.”

There are unguarded moments to be found too. ***Take Your Name***, featuring Mabel on piano, reflects on a particularly bad fallout, while ***Love Your Girl***brilliantly challenges cliches of the traditional break-up song. Stargate’s contributions are the regret-tinged sad synths of the unexpectedly moving ***Overthinking*** – featuring 24K Golden - and the dedication to friendship, ***Crying On The Dancefloor***. The remorse-filled ***When The Party’s Over***concludes the narrative of ‘About Last Night...’, but is really only half the story.

To really understand the album is to know the emotional journey Mabel has been on. Since debut track *Know Me Better* and breakthrough single *Finders Keepers* (2017), Mabel has been on a constant path of evolution: she surpassed a staggering twelth top 20 hit with ‘I Wish’ (a Joel Corry collaboration) at the start of 2022, and has surpassed 4 billion streams & 2.2 million adjusted album sales for debut album ‘High Expectations’ (the biggest selling debut by a British woman in 2019, led by the inescapable *Don’t Call Me Up*). Just before the world went into lockdown, Mabel won her first BRIT award for British Female Solo Artist (which she collected exactly 30 years to the day her mum, Neneh Cherry, won International Solo Artist In 1990). She presented her mother with her Icon Award at the NME Awards at the start of 2022.

Yet beneath it all, Mabel was struggling. Falling into an abyss of social media negativity, her confidence was slowly being shattered by hateful commentary that surreptitiously overpowered the multitude of positive affirmations. Mabel felt as though she wasn’t good enough, couldn’t do it, wasn’t sure if she even wanted to anymore. She had a month off over Christmas 2019 and slept through most of it, but got back to work, kept pushing through, facing her fears by opening the BRITs (and absolutely loving it) and finishing her sold-out tour on a high. But she still kept feeling lost. While she hugely appreciated all that she and her team had achieved, Mabel couldn’t block out the noise, from both the trolls and her own inner thoughts. She was exhausted, physically and emotionally, with little reserve to pull herself up and out of her spiritual slump.

Lockdown arrived just in time. It gave Mabel the space to be kind to herself, to stop overthinking and self criticising, to think things over quietly and calmly, to allow herself to work things out. She temporarily moved back to her parent’s home, read books, and listened to music. She went horse riding and took her dogs on long walks, began dance lessons and learnt how to do the splits. Slowly, Mabel started to spend more time in the studio. She played the piano and re-familiarised herself with Logic. “I thought, let me just make music for myself again.” She watched Bob Fosse choreography and 90s pop videos and felt the inspiration start to seep through. Slowly Mabel started to rebuild herself. She not only mentally repaired but physically and vocally she became stronger too.

“I feel truly confident for possibly the first time ever. I’ve lived a lot of my life caring about what other people might think and enough is enough. Own who the fuck you are and stop being apologietic. It’s exhausting to apologise for your existence. What I love most about this album is its fearlessness. More than anything, it’s a really fucking good pop record.”

This is a young woman living in full and self-actualised power, and what’s emerged is a record aimed to empower anyone who needs it. ‘About Last Night...’ focuses on the tiny, fleeting choices that constitute a big night out - but also those decisions that can be truly life-changing. Here is a project essentially about learning to live for the moment, and the hard-won wisdom that whatever there is to say ‘About Last Night…’ can wait until tomorrow, when the sun will come up again.

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