



NEW MUSIC

Mature beyond her tender years

She's won praise from Radio 6's Tom Robinson for her edgy, sassy songs and now Natasha Haws is wearing her heart on her sleeve for her debut EP, as Ian McCabe writes

When I first discovered South Shields singer-songwriter Natasha Haws, I was blown away by her distinct vocals, stripped back finger-picking guitar and heart clenching sincerity. If there's one quality that entices me most to a person it's their honesty, and Natasha exudes it.

That's why I was so surprised when she told me she was only 17 years old. Our chat was going so well, why would this confident teenager lie? Natasha, a Performing Arts student at Newcastle College, says: "I'm 18 next month though."

What comes as no surprise however is where Natasha calls home. Wearside is steadily producing a trend of talented, up and coming musicians and songwriters, some of which have appeared on these pages in the last few months. It's an area evidently bursting with creativity, and one which Natasha embodies perfectly.

"There something mint happening in the Sunderland area at the moment," says Natasha. "I think there's a peak in the music scene. We're like a little family here and we're all really proud of each other."

And so they should be. In one year, Natasha Haws has gone from covering her favourite songs at local buskers' nights to performing her own material in front of sell-out crowds at the Gateshead Sage, supporting fellow Wearside band

The Lake Poets.

"I just don't know how to explain it," she beams. "It was a massive milestone in my life. After playing at bars and clubs, and then playing at a venue built for sound, it was just mind blowing. That was an important night for us because it showed that local music could sell out a gig at the Sage."

It has been a whirlwind year for Natasha, highlighted with a supporting set for Stephen Fretwell at a packed Cluny 2, which brought some audience members to the brink of tears.

She was also chosen from over local 150 acts to perform at last Septembers Split Transmission event at the Sunderland Museum and Winter Gardens. Amazingly, it was only her second ever show, but a pivotal one. "It changed my life," she says. "Without that, I wouldn't be where I am right now."

This month, Natasha is releasing her debut self-titled EP which is produced by Detroit Social Clubs David Burn and includes an appearance by The Lake Poets.

The EP comprises three of Natasha's most personal songs, including the inspirational Constant Fairytale, a song about her young brother's brave battle with epilepsy. "I wrote that when he was really poorly," she says. "Yet, all he wanted to do was to play all of the time; he didn't let it affect his life."

Honesty and emotion are traits that are important to Natasha and which shine through all of her songs. She wears her heart on her sleeve. "A lot of song writers are scared to show their true emotions in case they upset someone they know personally," she explains. "I think you've got to let that go a bit and write whatever is meaningful to you."

She adds: "I have upset people personally, in a way, because I haven't had the guts to say some things without being able to put it in a song. Saying it prettily with a guitar sometimes puts some cotton wool around it."

● *Natasha is launching her EP at Sunderland's Minster Church on May 12 with support from Reckoner and Arbeia. An after show party features a DJ set by The Futureheads. The EP will be available at Natasha's Bandcamp webpage, <http://natashahaws.bandcamp.com>*




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