

Shura got too sad for her friends

ELLA GAUCI speaks to the synth-pop sapphic star about her latest album, gaming and loneliness

2020 was the year the world shut down. As the Covid-19 pandemic crossed continents, life as we knew it completely altered. Shura, also known as Alexandra Lilah Denton, had just moved to New York, ready to see the bright lights of the concrete jungle around her. Instead, she had to stay inside. Alone, in a city she had only just begun to know, she felt isolated. Disconnected. And eventually, she got too sad for her friends.

It was this experience which inspired her third studio album, aptly titled *I Got Too Sad For My Friends*. Known for her synth-pop sapphic songs, Shura has become a firm fixture in the queer music scene. Playing songs like *Touch* and *What's It Gonna Be?* on stages like Glastonbury and Coachella, Shura has given queer people everywhere a soundtrack to both party to and cry to. With tracks featured in beloved shows like *Heartstopper* and *Sex Education*, there's no denying that Shura is a sapphic icon.

Nestled into her Twitch streaming studio, Shura greets me with a huge grin, chatting excitedly about her favourite new show *Arcane*. Her demeanour changes when we talk about the album itself, and it's clear that this project has required a huge amount of introspection about a difficult period. Loneliness, she shares with me, was the driving inspiration behind the album.

"That side of loneliness, that side of depression – it was the most strange part of sadness," Shura says. "It was the part I felt most unprepared for. The sadder my world got, the smaller my world got. I felt myself sort of shrinking, and I felt my friends shrinking away from me."

Tracks like *Recognise* and *Leonard Street* recount these difficult emotions, and while the album was

born from a place of emotional struggle, Shura hopes that there will be comfort for listeners. "I hope it's like an armchair or a sofa that people sort of can crawl up into, and feel like spooned and cradled by," she smiles. "But at the same time, they can have their headphones on and be bawling their eyes out."

Like Shura's previous albums, specifically her second release, *forever*, which focused on religious imagery, *I Got Too Sad For My Friends* is heavily influenced by non-musical concepts. The artwork itself, showcasing a very regal Shura in a full suit of armour, invites listeners to think about the different forms of isolation. Taking inspiration from Leonardo DiCaprio's infamous role in *Romeo + Juliet*, as well as Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's novel *The Little Prince*, Shura wanted to show how this loneliness had left her feeling stranded in unknown territory.



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"We really wanted to make sure that I was in a desolate place," she tells me about the artwork. "A place that could be like almost another planet... but instead of another planet, we went to Wales!"

Another key inspiration in Shura's work is a lot closer to home: her computer. After becoming a pro-streamer during the pandemic, playing the game *Baldur's Gate 3* multiple times, she's found an appreciation for all things fantasy. With games like *The Last Of Us* bringing sapphic representation to more screens than ever, Shura explains that gaming has become a safe haven for her.

Photos: Sophie Williams

"Queer people love gaming. I think especially lonely queer people or sad queer people," she expands. "I think it's a wonderful place where we can dive into and be whoever we want to be. I think there's something really fun about being able to actually interact and sort of have a say in your own story in a way that maybe we feel sometimes we don't in real life."

When lockdown restrictions were lifted across the world, Shura found herself back in London. As a lifelong keen footballer, she returned to the pitch in the hopes that community would help her shake the isolation. However, she recalls that her first training session was anything but.

"I was so overwhelmed by the number of people," she tells me. "I'd just been so kind of starved of human interaction that I could barely look anyone in the eye. My eyes were just down on the floor."

Six years after the release of her last album, *I Got Too Sad For My Friends* feels her most vulnerable yet. She delights in talking about the sapphic renaissance that has taken over the music industry since the start of her career. Gushing over the stratospheric rise of stars like Chappell Roan, she also takes a moment to reflect on the monumental impact that pop duo Tegan and Sara had on her life. "They were the first lesbian

musicians I was ever aware of Googling in my attic. In fact, I still have their DIVA cover!"

On the note of reflection, I ask which of her previous selves she would show this beautifully personal album to first. She takes a moment to think. "My 21-year-old self, post-uni," she says wistfully. "Not as a warning, per se. But just to be like: you made this. Keep going. Just as this little treat of like: these are all the journeys that you're going to go on, don't be afraid to explore." **D**

I Got Too Sad For My Friends comes out on 30 May