

Abbi Ellis will remember to romanticize the now

How the introspective singer-songwriter is learning to love her former iterations and finding present inspiration on her album Clementine.

BY: TYLER LUGINSKI



Story photos via [Abbi Ellis](#)

The saying goes that the past informs the present, but how often does it translate from nostalgia to know-how: repetition to resurgence? In the milieu of folk-leaning singer-songwriter [Abbi Ellis](#), the past is the hallowed ground upon which the specters of lingering emotion and faded memories breathe new life into the here and now.

“It’s kind of a funny phenomenon,” said Ellis. “I think it’s easier to remember how something felt than what actually happened.”

The 25-year-old, Chattanooga-based musician has always traveled in the hyper-personal and autobiographical. Turning to songwriting upon entering college in 2016, Ellis found the newness of young adult independence to be a catalyst for exploring new emotional depths.

“That year, I really started writing a lot,” Ellis said. “Which I guess comes with the territory of being in a new place, experiencing new things and meeting a lot of fun and interesting people. A lot of the writing happened to be revolving around coming to terms with the fact that I struggle with anxiety and depression and seeing a therapist for the first time: just really trying to figure shit out.”

The early recordings

Many of the songs written around this time would come to make up her 2019 EP [“Medicine,”](#) a charming collection of pop-tinged indie tunes that marked Ellis’ first studio recording endeavor and the start of finding a signature sound.

“I literally was like, ‘I don’t know what to do, all of my songs are just acoustic,” Ellis said, referring to her work on the with Matt Wilbur, a producer at the Lakeland Florida-based recording studio The Vanguard Room. “Do you hear something in this, and can you help me kind of navigate it?”

“The experience of writing those songs and also getting to bring them to life in the studio absolutely changed the game for me,” Ellis continued. “It really helped me develop a sound that I loved and also gave me a good starting point of where I wanted to go from there.”



Following the personal and creative success of the EP, Ellis found herself back at The Vanguard Room, this time recording with producer Bryce Rivera.

“I had a few songs written and recorded with the Vanguard that had just been sitting in my pocket for a while, and I really wanted to work them into something,” Ellis said. “So initially, I had thought of trying to write two more songs and making that a little EP in itself.”

Hello Clementine

During this recording process came a creative epiphany: an album combining elements from “Medicine” and the new material.

“Then I wrote ‘Clementine,’” Ellis said. “That is really what brought everything together for me.”

[This new album](#), titled after the song mentioned above, is the culmination of Ellis' personal and musical realizations, meant to provide a way forward by earnestly looking toward the past.

"I've always struggled with contentment," Ellis said. "For as long as I can remember, I've spent a lot of time romanticizing the future and looking forward to what is next. Something I've realized recently is that I also romanticize the past. Basically, I'm just here romanticizing anything that I'm not living right now."

"Basically, I'm just here romanticizing anything that I'm not living right now."

Like many other artists in recent years, this realization of misinterpreted memories was born out of the takeaways from the pandemic.



“Over the pandemic, I really beat myself up for how I spent that time because I didn't write much,” Ellis said. “Obviously, we were all going through a lot of stuff at the time. It took a long time for me to come out of that.”

Making space for the present

Here, it's this throughline of rose-colored remembrance that provides the central themes of “Clementine.” Where “Medicine” found Ellis coming to terms with fears of the future, this album repositions those anxieties by giving them the proper space to be fully acknowledged and embraced while coping with newfound tendencies to overembellish the past.

“[‘Medicine’] had this message of healing that I was trying to give myself: of letting go of things you can't control and resting easy,” Ellis said. “In writing [‘Clementine’], I started to see patterns in myself: some stuff I already knew, but then some stuff that was really revelatory.”

“That idea of romanticizing my past really started this whole spiral,” Ellis continued. “‘Wow, I romanticize this past version of myself,’ or ‘I’m remembering things wrong.’ That is what I ended up formulating the whole album around.”

This concept of romanticization can be heard in just about every aspect of the album. Take the lead single [“Weak Knees,”](#) a quintessential love song meant to be a gut punch of nostalgia for young love.



“I hope that people listen and remember what it felt like to fall in love for the first time, to have those little crushes,” Ellis said. “Because there's nothing like those butterflies.”

In other places, the excess of the past gives way to an embrace of daily simplicity, like on the standout folk-rock ballad [“Simple Man.”](#) Written from the perspective of a grandfather-in-law, Ellis paints the serene beauty of a pastoral landscape observed from an evening on the back porch. It’s a different type of romance, filtered through the eyes of a loved one.



“The biggest shift in the song is that back porch moment,” Ellis said. “Of really getting to sit and just be and seeing everything he sees in his life, but in a new, almost holy lens.”

A former me

While the syrupy-sweet love songs and heartfelt odes to aging family members play an integral role, the ethos of the album reaches toward a more profound place: one that looks to recognize the truth of your lived experience without disparaging the parts of yourself that long to remember things in a gentler light.

"I kind of made the connection," Ellis said. "'Oh, we could sing about this person and personify this person that remembers things wrong, who sees things in black and white: oh, wait a minute, that's me.' More specifically, a past version of myself. That's exactly who Clementine is: just a former me."



“That’s exactly who Clementine is: just a former me.”

That balance is what ultimately makes the narrative arch of Clementine so compelling: discovering the push and pull of who we once were and how that can inform new ways we can care for ourselves now.

“It almost felt like part of me accepting myself exactly how I am,” Ellis said. “And also giving grace to Clementine: accepting that in a lot of ways, I’m still that person, and we’re both just trying to make it.”

You can follow Abbi Ellis on Instagram [@byabbiellis](https://www.instagram.com/byabbiellis) and listen to her music on all major streaming platforms.

