

NINA MOINI: Well, here on *Minnesota Now*, if you like to listen at noon, we play local music every day. And when we broadcast from the state fair, that music is live for us. Very exciting. Our next guest is an artist from Duluth who's been making a pretty big name for herself in the Minnesota music scene. Sophie Hiroko grew up along Lake Superior. She's had a big couple of years. She won the 2025 Palomino Grant from the Duluth band Trampled by Turtles. She's released an EP. She was picked as one of First Avenue's Best New Bands of 2025, and she recently headlined at the 7th Street entry. Please give a warm welcome to Sophie Hiroko. Take it away, Sophie.

[APPLAUSE]

[SOPHIE HIROKO, "GUILTY 22"]

(SINGING) On my knees for you again

Blood washed clean of blasphemy by then

Golden green until the summer's end

Trudge along the pavement like a friend

Break my habit the way you break my bed

Try to stay away from wet cement

There's gobs of spit and salt in my immense

Suffering between your swollen hands and I die

Wanting to turn my cheek to you

Holding you and guilty 22.

Endless birth day

Burns my breath to you.

Then I die wanting

Bathe me in your blue

In the dining room the perfume of your tears

Tangible before you disappear

Unlucky stars are common around here

Sorry eyes apologize like deer

And I die wanting to turn my cheek to you

Holy union, guilty 22

Endless birthday binds my breath to you

And I die wanting

Bathe me in your blue

[CHEERS AND APPLAUSE]

NINA MOINI: Woo, woo! Give it up, everybody, for Sophie Hiroko. We'll give you a chance to put your instruments down. And you can come over here and have a seat with me. Let's give it up for Sophie again, everybody. Beautiful.

[APPLAUSE]

Sophie, thanks for being here and for sharing not only one, but you're going to share another song with us later on.

SOPHIE Yes, my honor, thank you so much for having me.

HIROKO:

NINA MOINI: Tell me a little bit about "Guilty 22." What was that all about? What were you thinking about when you wrote it?

SOPHIE "Guilty 22" is my newest song that I've written. I wrote it probably a couple weeks ago.

HIROKO:

NINA MOINI: Oh.

SOPHIE I was reading a Rimbaud collection of poetry, so I was thinking about Verlaine and Rimbaud, and then also what it's like to be in relationship with other sensitive artists who all have big feelings.

HIROKO:

NINA MOINI: Hmm. [LAUGHS]

SOPHIE You know, it can be kind of hard, but it's also the best thing.

HIROKO:

NINA MOINI: So your music has been described as-- I love this-- tender bubble grunge. I love it. What does that mean to you? How did you land on that sound?

SOPHIE That was the first label that I ever used to describe my sound, which, yes, I think is still relevant. But I think the more I think about it, my music is grunge and the bubble is just my personality. I think for some bubble grunge can be used to describe grunge in a feminine way. But I have walked that back because my music is grunge whether or not-- however I identify with my gender.

HIROKO:

NINA MOINI: Yeah. And maybe it's always changing, too, a little bit, which is totally OK.

SOPHIE Yeah, totally, and tender always.

HIROKO:

NINA MOINI: Yeah. Always tender. I love that. Me too. So you grew up in Duluth right along Lake Superior. How much does that beautiful landscape show up in your music? Do you like to be out there when you're writing at all?

SOPHIE I grew up on Park Point on the lake side, and my best songs have definitely come from writing in that space. That landscape means the most to me out of everything in the whole world and evokes many feelings for me. And I think Duluth is kind of a vortex of feelings. My dreams are always really vivid there, so it's a great creative place for me to be.

HIROKO:

NINA MOINI: Yeah, and a lot of your songs do deal with difficult themes and things that bring out emotion for people, whether it be grief, death, maybe rebirth. Why is it important for you to explore all different kinds of areas of yourself through your music?

SOPHIE I'm a big, big feeler, so everything feels really intense for me. I could be called a crybaby if you wanted to be mean, but I think music is the number one way that I deal and cope with the difficulties of living, and growing up, and facing challenges that you could have never predicted for yourself. So it's the best way for me to feel better about where I'm at.

HIROKO:

NINA MOINI: And you've probably been interested in music for a long time, but you have had, it seems, like a really fast rise over the past couple years-- have been really formative for you. I mentioned you won that Palomino Grant from Trampled by Turtles last year, 2025. What did it mean to you as someone who grew up listening to that band?

SOPHIE It means so much to me that I have such a hard time describing the gratitude, but I feel it in my bones. Like, I physically ache with gratitude if I think about it. I did grow up going to see that Trampled concert at Bayfront every year with my friends. And it was unbelievable to be standing on that stage, looking out over the hill, and seeing friends and family I hadn't seen in so many years. It was one of the most beautiful experiences I've ever had.

HIROKO:

NINA MOINI: Yeah, and just to be acknowledged by people that you respect in a craft is amazing. So that grant. I understand. It was more than symbolic. It helped you go on your first tour. What did you learn about yourself and being a musician from being out on the road like that?

SOPHIE I went by myself with my sister, who's five years younger than me-- so she was 18 and I was 23-- and it was so fun. It was a very sisterly experience with some big, funny fights.

HIROKO:

NINA MOINI: I bet, yeah.

SOPHIE And so many laughs. And I learned a lot about my ability to move through-- like I was just saying, with my songwriting, I was able to move through challenges and assert myself in situations where I needed to know what I wanted. And that's a good skill that I really feel like I learned on the road.

HIROKO:

NINA MOINI: Did you learn anything about what your body needs, how to take care with those long hours and traveling?

SOPHIE Yes. I definitely cannot drive for a long stretch of time. Waffle House saved my life many times. Yeah, eating good food is important, and going and spending time in nature, because at the end of the day, I am a woods-- a nature girl. So I definitely require green space.

HIROKO:

NINA MOINI: Totally. So you released that new music this year we were talking about. You have an EP. Are you working on a debut album, or what's coming up for you?

SOPHIE Yes, this is the first time that I would have this announcement, but I have just secured time at Pachyderm Studio, which was a part of that grant from Trampled By Turtles.

HIROKO:

NINA MOINI: Amazing.

SOPHIE So we're going to record there. And then I'm working on something with Matt Castore, who I did *to the core* with.
HIROKO: It's a very collaborative single that's going to come out first, and then we'll get that stuff done in the recording studio. And hopefully it all comes out as a patchwork album. So it's going to happen.

NINA MOINI: Amazing. Congratulations. Wish you the best on that.

SOPHIE Thank you.
HIROKO:

NINA MOINI: So you're part of this younger generation, I guess, of Minnesota musicians that are kind of building audiences in a different music industry, a different way to reach people and be with them where they are. What has surprised you about trying to make this dream happen as a musician? What have you maybe learned or learned about yourself that surprised you?

SOPHIE I think I can feel and see that all of us human beings right now are suffering to some degree. And I think the fact
HIROKO: that what I am writing about is very deep and heavy material-- but I also bring some sort of movement-- you want to move your body, or you want to nod your head, or think about something, which is thought movement-- I think that has been my most resonating connection between myself and audience. And so I think it's like a feeling of pain and despair we all feel, but also hope at the end of the day. So it feels good. And I can see that with my peers too.

NINA MOINI: Yeah. Along those lines, what do you think people experience when they come to a show of yours? Or what do you hope that they walk away with?

SOPHIE I hope it's catharsis. I hope it's some sort of introspective reflection and also having fun. And most importantly,
HIROKO: want to get more girls, more queer people up on the stage too.

NINA MOINI: And just who are some of your heroes? Who are some of your inspirations? They can be Minnesota folks or not, but just kind of people that you're always-- they're kind of always with you in your back pocket.

SOPHIE Definitely Patti Smith is my biggest inspiration. I love her so much. She's my favorite. The Velvet Underground
HIROKO: and Lou Reed-- really important to me. I also really love this band called Quasi right now. I really love them a lot. And basically women and queer people everywhere whether or not they're musicians, I just feel so inspired by the perseverance that we've all had to go through.

NINA MOINI: So before we let you go, you're going to play another song for us called "Divorce." I'd ask, what's that about, but I think I might. Tell us a little bit about the inspiration for that.

SOPHIE Well, I was married young when I was 21, and I ended up getting divorced young as well. The marriage lasted
HIROKO: two years. But my best friend ever, we just realized that we're just friends, which I'm glad we realized that--

NINA MOINI: Sure.

SOPHIE

HIROKO:

--early on. And still a difficult thing to separate yourself from a life I was depending on. When you commit yourself to something to a legal degree, you can kind of expect that that's what's going to happen for you. But for it to not work out, even though it was the most loving separation, it's still devastating to think, oh my gosh, what am I going to do now? But this is what I'm doing now. I also kind of had to move away from Duluth to pursue this dream. So I don't regret anything.

NINA MOINI:

Amazing. And you just pour it into your art and your music. Sophie Hiroko, thank you so much. Can we give it up for Sophie? Thank you so much for joining us here at the Minnesota State Fair. You're going to play one more song. We'll let you get set up for your song to play us out. We appreciate it so much.

First, we have to thank everyone who made this show possible today. Senior producer Aleesa Kuznetsov, producers Alanna Elder, Ellen Finn, Nock Booie, and Gretchen Brown, our engineers Tessa Bloch, Erik Stromsted, Derek Ramirez, and Maurizio de Rico, Anika Best in the audience! Give it up for Anika, everybody! Our senior producer of events is Tom Campbell. It takes a real team, everybody. Thanks to everyone else who makes it possible.

If you're listening and you're coming out to the fair, come visit us at the corner of Judson and Nelson. In just 30 minutes on this stage, we'll hear a trumpet quartet with *Your Classical*. Then the *Currents* morning show will be recording live in the afternoon. That's from 3:00 to 7:00. And we'll be back here next week with the *Minnesota Now* team Thursday at noon for another live show. Sophie is going to play us out with her song "Divorce." Take it away, Sophie!

[SOPHIE HIROKO, "DIVORCE"] Fog is rolling in, collecting droplets on my skin

And I realize I am unafraid

Of facing everything all alone again

A twisted tale of tender hearts tangled together under the burning sun of change

I love you so much my tender heart, it breaks

The kind of love that us to share something special

I was not prepared at all

The metamorphosis of every version of you I've ever known

And I hardly recognize who you were the night we fell in love

And I hardly sleep at night, knowing you and I can't go on

'Til death do I part is not a lie, but we have grown

And you're my number one cosmic connection set in stone

I am lying all alone

This empty house has never felt like less of a home

Should have avoided legal papers but how could we have known?

And I hardly recognize who we were the night we fell in love And I--

CREW: Support comes from Ramsey County Environmental Health, with the message, recycling exists. Minnesotans can learn the real story behind recycling and how to recycle right in the Twin Cities metro area at recyclingexists.com.

SOPHIE (SINGING) --is not a lie but we have grown

HIROKO:

And you're my number one cosmic connection.