

[DILLY DALLY ALLEY, "BATHTUB BORN"]

SOPHIA (SINGING) Oh, come back in my room tonight, my own worst needing repairs. Stone, blown, cold, lone wolf
SPIEGEL: running his own state of affairs.

EMILY REESE: By now, I'm sure you already know, but here on *Minnesota Now*, we highlight Minnesota musicians every single day. But on some special days like today, we get to really dive in with one local musician or band. And do we have a treat for you today.

The music you just heard is by the up and coming Minneapolis-based band with a very fun name-- Dilly Dally Alley. They just released their first ever album called *Make You Whole*. The band is led by Sophia Spiegel who joins me now to share some more music and talk about the band. Sophia, welcome to *Minnesota Now*.

SOPHIA Thank you so much for having me, Emily. It's good to be here.
SPIEGEL:

EMILY REESE: Glad to have you. So that song we just heard is off your debut album. The song is called "Bathtub Born." What's it about? I love the sound, by the way.

SOPHIA Oh, thank you it. Was about a really nice self-care evening, and I wanted to write a song about it. I took a bath. I
SPIEGEL: felt reborn. I had some insights from it. And it also is from-- I mean, it's a breakup tune. I mean, it was coming out of a hard moment.

And I think that particular day I had a really influential and lovely conversation with somebody who helped me reframe the situation in a more hopeful way. And that's kind of how it was made. It started on cello and loop pedal, and then when I decided to put it on the record, suddenly we had all these other tricks and bells and whistles that we could add onto it.

EMILY REESE: Oh, I love that about having enough space to bring all the pieces together, too. And I wanted to get into-- you've got a six-part band. There's alto sax, trumpet, violin. That's a full sound you have to work. With it's so fun. Are you all involved in that songwriting process?

SOPHIA Yeah, we're a big family in various ways. I like to say I provide the bones of the tunes. I write the cord structures
SPIEGEL: and the lyrics. And then I think-- I mean, at least with this record, it grew slowly and organically. It started with just a four-piece band.

So the original members of Dilly Dally Alley were-- it was me, Will Kjeer on keys, Kevin Yetter on drums, and Maxwell Voda on bass. And when I introduced these tunes to them, I think they really put their own creative stamp of genius on it.

And it wasn't until we went into the studio and tracked everything that I decided thereafter that I wanted to add a little horn fire to it. And at that point, I wrote-- just through-composed the horn parts.

EMILY REESE: I'd love to hear another song of yours.

[DILLY DALLY ALLEY, "GIVE YOURSELF UP TO YOURSELF"]

SOPHIA (SINGING) As we say it on a lake, thinking about things, waiting for the Earth to take back what's hers, endlessly.

SPIEGEL: Follow. As we say it in the--

EMILY REESE: I love that sound. So tell me some more about this song.

SOPHIA This song was born on the shores of Bde Maka Ska a really good conversation with a dear friend, Justin

SPIEGEL: Halverson, who cowrote the first verse and the chorus with me. I mean, it started off with just a conversation about this shared experience we had in the Boundary Waters. I mean, it was more just like, what? You were there at the same time during this big storm, and you also almost died?

A confluence moment that, I think, inspired a deeper conversation about just our various moments of stuckness at the time and how that storm affected us. And so I think the big takeaway from that conversation was the difficult situations that you go through. It's not necessarily the difficult situation itself that keeps you stuck in it.

It's the shame that you feel towards yourself or the flak that you're giving yourself that can keep you in that cycle. And so the title, "Give Yourself Up to Yourself" is really trying to say that. Embrace all the little bits of yourself, and that is what can really help transform a difficult situation into a wise one.

EMILY REESE: How did you get your start in music?

SOPHIA Sure. Yeah, I mean, I started at a young age singing. My mom is who I would credit to my music. She raised us,

SPIEGEL: really, through music. If we would have little, stupid temper tantrums as kids, she would often have us sing to calm down.

She would have the sad song that she wrote or the wake-up song, if we were groggy and didn't want to get out of bed. She herself is a vocalist. And the way I still come home to my two sisters and my mom is by singing together, and I think that still just feels very much like home.

And then, yeah, I started cello when I was five. And I was raised in a pretty classical tradition-- following music on the page and playing in just ensembles where the whole goal is to honor the composer's wishes or whatever. And it wasn't until I became a teenager and maybe wanted to break out of that box, be a wee, little rebel that I started playing guitar.

And that was more of like the instrument that I could come back to myself in. And it was the instrument that was very much for me for a very long time. It started to become, like, a sonic diary for me. And, yeah, I mean, it wasn't until college that I decided to start sharing some of those tunes with people, which felt very vulnerable at the time.

EMILY REESE: It can be terrifying to share your work for the first time.

SOPHIA Oh, my gosh. You almost have to be stupid. You almost have to be, like, brash and say, my silly, little idea is

SPIEGEL: worth your time to listen to.

EMILY REESE: And that's what artists do. So I read in your band's bio that you're known for bringing an excess of balloons to your performances, and I am intrigued. What's that all about?

SOPHIA We always clean them up. That's something we want to just make sure venues know about, too.

SPIEGEL:

EMILY REESE: Good for you.

SOPHIA
SPIEGEL: We started as a band-- we started performing in the spring of 2021. [INAUDIBLE] last year was our debut performance. And that was the moment where I felt like everybody-- at least in Minneapolis-- maybe felt this shift to, like, we could maybe, safely, if you felt comfortable be in crowds again and I think really wanted to almost viscerally break people out of their comfort zone a little bit because it felt really uncomfortable at first to be in crowded spaces.

The balloon experiment came from wanting to be able to hold the audience's attention in their hand and make them feel like their dreams, their fears, their wishes could held in that sonic space. We have-- you basically blow your dreams, and fears, and wishes into a balloon, and I this exercise to calm you down and bring that out.

And then I just say, like, with every ounce of verve and grit that you have, as if your dreams are inside that balloon, just bonk them around for the rest of the performance. The hope is that people really feel like the performance that their experience has a tangible effect on them. So, yeah, that's kind of what the balloons--

EMILY REESE: That must be so much fun in concert.

SOPHIA
SPIEGEL: It is really fun. And it's really, really chaotic, too.

EMILY REESE: So whenever we talk to musicians, we want to hear what music they're listening to or what's inspiring their songwriting. I understand you're also a Lianne La Havas fan. You sent us one of her songs.

SOPHIA
SPIEGEL: Indeed.

EMILY REESE: Let's take a listen.

[LIANNE LA HAVAS, "SOUR FLOWER"]

SOPHIA
SPIEGEL: (SINGING) No more looking out for someone else but me, fighting an old war, reaching out for something out of reach.

EMILY REESE: Oh, that's dreamy. That's beautiful. That was Lianne La Havas with her song "Sour Flower." What do you like about that artist?

SOPHIA
SPIEGEL: Oh, my goodness. Words cannot describe my love for Lianne La Havas. She was my biggest muse, I think, in wanting to take songwriting seriously. And I think it's because she's both able to frame the silver lining and the clouds at the same time so, so well.

And this album, in particular-- this is the end of her album. And, I mean, it's in this 5/4 meter. 5/4 is never really supposed to be that compelling of a meter. It's kind of heady. And yet, I don't even know what it is. It just sinks so deep in your bones.

There's a moment in this tune where she says, "working out just how to find my way. But I'm still learning. Now I'm home. I know I'm going to stay, hard as it may be." And her voice kind of cracks in that moment, and your heart also just cracks at the same time.

I mean, she just-- I think she just really sends home this message that sometimes it's really hard to be doing well, and that takes a lot of hard work. And I think she's able to hold people's vulnerability in her hands so tenderly and powerfully at the same time. As somebody who just wants to be held in that vulnerability, just like-- I just love that.

EMILY REESE: Sophia, it has been so nice talking with you. Thank you, and good luck with everything you're doing.

SOPHIA Thank you so much, Emily.

SPIEGEL:

EMILY REESE: And I'd love to go out on a song, so tell us what we're about to hear.

SOPHIA This is a song called "See How She Moves." And, honestly, it's just about a girl I had a crush on in college. She

SPIEGEL: was beautiful because she moved in a certain way. I hope you like it.

[DILLY DALLY ALLEY, "SEE HOW SHE MOVES"]

(SINGING) Driving up the hill, dragging myself from the [? woman ?] my room. Shaking the thick smoke of--

EMILY REESE: That was Sophia Spiegel, the leader of the Minneapolis-based band Dilly Dally Alley. Their debut album *Make You Whole* is out now, and you can catch their album release show at the Turf Club in St. Paul tomorrow evening. Doors open at 7:00.

You can also find their music and other upcoming performances at DillyDallyAlleyBand.com. Arts Programming on MPR News is made possible in part by the Minnesota Legacy Amendment Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund.