

The Stamps – debut album bio

There are some feelings we all know but can struggle to name. The knowledge that you can't have everything, or everyone, in your life at the same time. That happy longing and love for friends and family who are far away. A gratitude for all that you've experienced, tinged with the fear that by opening some doors, you've closed others. The Portuguese would call it *saudades*, an untranslatable word that speaks to the bittersweet inevitability of change, distance and time. The Stamps just call it growing up.

On their debut album, The Stamps – AKA Scarlett Graham, Rubina Bertolini and Sofia Hourani – have bottled the sound of leaving home, getting older, and yearning for past places and people, while still moving ever forward into something new.

At age 15, the trio met at their Fremantle high school and formed an immediate bond. They swiftly became collaborators, finding music came as easy to them as friendship had. When Scarlett Graham went back to her native Canada for a stint, the trio stayed in touch via snail mail – the letters they posted each other eventually inspiring their band name. In the years that followed, the trio remained side-by-side as they grew older, moved away from their hometown and started afresh somewhere new, music always serving as their meeting place. This album is their deeply personal document of that transformative period.

Each song on the album captures a specific moment in time for one of The Stamps. Both Sofia and Scarlett write songs – occasionally together, but usually apart, using their songwriting like private diary entries. A la Boy Genius, all three members of The Stamps sing. On some songs, one voice takes the lead; on others the trio come together to create their gentle vocal harmonies, giving flight to their achingly tender, quietly poetic pop songs. Every song on the album was written because “it needed to be”, The Stamps say – to process the big changes, to find an outlet for the loud thoughts.

But while Scarlett, Robina and Sofia managed to retain their connection when they were on different continents, not every friendship can survive the tyranny of distance. The album begins with lead single ‘Slow Burn’, on which Scarlett Graham reflects on playing phone tag with a friend separated by oceans, trying and failing to keep in touch. *“I wanna believe that trying to be heard is the greatest thing to do/ But it's a slow burn getting back to you”*, she sings, longing to reunite with someone she feels is slipping away. ‘Meryl Streep’ was written not about that famed movie star but the thoughts of innocence, growing up, friendships and relationships that occurred to Scarlett one night as she sat watching *The Devil Wears Prada*, her mind wandering to other things. On ‘Jamie’s Song’ – so named for a fleeting friend met while travelling – Scarlett wonders where the people who come into our lives for a short time end up, realising we may be more like the people who pass us by than we first realise.

On ‘Holy Verse’, Sofia Hourani finds herself in the grips of an existential crisis. Written on her 20th birthday, she grapples with getting older, carving new paths, and wondering who you are when prised apart from the family who moulded you. ‘Move Me On’ has Sofia reflect on the way we build people up in our heads, while apart, to be something bigger than they really are, and on ‘Free My Mind’ she struggles to find the words for that which overwhelms her. And on ‘My City’, Scarlett and Sofia write together about leaving Perth behind for Melbourne, wondering if, when they return, it will still be their city.

‘Bitter Place’ finds Scarlett reflecting on how we spend the little time we get, chewing over Sylvia Plath’s famed fig tree metaphor. In *The Bell Jar*, Plath saw the different possibilities of her life branching out figs on a tree; she wanted them all in different ways but as she failed to choose one, each wrinkled and fell to the ground. They were words that felt resonate for a 20-year-old at the crossroads of a few different lives, choosing which path to walk down. It’s

a song that, like the entirety of the album, feels bittersweet, accepting the way light and dark inevitably dance together. Finally, on album closer 'In All The Ways I Am', The Stamps pledge to stay true to themselves even as everything around them changes; to stand, at the end, and see things clearly.

The Stamps have the easy equilibrium that comes from being friends first, bandmates second. Together, they balance each other, fitting together like puzzle pieces – Sophia is the planner, Rubina is the daydreamer and Scarlett the exuberant extrovert. And the trio share an almost telepathic connection, able to communicate with just a sideways glance on stage or finish each other's sentences with a loving laugh in private conversation. It's a tight-knit bond that is woven like gentle magic through each of their songs. To retain that perfect alchemy, they deliberately kept the team working on their debut album small – opting not to bring in co-writers or collaborators, instead working only with producer Tom Josephs, a pair of backing musicians, and renowned mix engineer Michael Brauer, known for his work with the likes of Coldplay and Florence and the Machine.

Their vision was to create as authentic a document of their friendship as possible. After over two years of writing, the trio selected the nine songs on the album for the truth they felt it captured about the half decade they've lived through together. They kept the footprints of that friendship in their songs, from the way you can hear Sofia smiling as she sings in the back-up vocals of 'Meryl Streep' or Rubina stomping around in the outro of 'In All The Ways I Am'.

The album also marks a change in sonic direction for The Stamps, as they break away from their folk beginnings and step into a more indie pop sound – one that better suited their new maturity and allowed them to explore a deeper, more introspective voice. In their early career, The Stamps had success winning Triple J's Collab Comp, scoring airplay on the station with tracks like 'Seven Years of Bad Luck', supporting the likes of Boy & Bear on tour, and earning kudos for their cover of Slowdive's classic track 'Alison' from the band themselves. Now, with their debut album, they enter a new chapter – discovering more about themselves and the world around them with every step, remaining hopeful, grateful and, always, the very best of friends as they go.

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Words: Katie Cunningham