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FROM THE STAGE

Sophomore Nancy Dunkle launches music career through singles, house show performances



Throughout her experience in song-writing and performing at house shows, sophomore Nancy Dunkle has launched her music career. Her first single 'Poster Child' is out now on all streaming platforms. MEGHAN HENDRICKS | PHOTO EDITOR

By Abby Presson

AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT EDITOR

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Growing up in a tight-knit neighborhood in Buffalo, Nancy Dunkle was always surrounded by art and music. Some of her earliest memories center around friends, family and community members bonding over their shared love for music in each other's basements. Now, Dunkle has taken to the basements of Syracuse's local house-show scene, showcasing her own work and talents.

Dunkle, currently a sophomore in Syracuse University's Setnor School of Music, hasn't let her artistic upbringing go. Instead, she launched her music career while still a college student through releasing music on streaming platforms and performing on the Syracuse house show circuit.

Though she'd been writing her own music for years, Dunkle had never intended on producing or releasing any. But after a friend convinced her that producing a song for release could be fun, the two got together to work. The result was "Poster Child," Dunkle's first, and so far only, single.

"I didn't even really think about it at that point," Dunkle said. "It was just for fun, but then I was like, 'wait, I love doing this so much.' And it kind of just naturally continued from there."

A self-described indie rock musician, Dunkle draws inspiration from everywhere she can – her own personal life, her friends' experiences, even an idea from a movie or TV show. Stepping into another person's shoes is fun to try, Dunkle said.

The wide range of sources Dunkle uses to mold her songs allows her to continually make new music. When she has an idea, she shares it with the friends she works with, like Giulianna Iapalucci, who is also a drummer in Dunkle's live performance band. Iapalucci, along with Dunkle's other friends, gives feedback and helps Dunkle decide which songs to fully produce and record first.

"Nancy will send me a new voice memo of a song she's writing every other night and is constantly jotting down all these ideas," Iapalucci said. "It just comes so naturally to her. The lyrics just come spewing out of her without even trying."

Releasing music isn't the only big step that Dunkle's taken in her music career in the last year. She's also stepped into the network of students who open their houses to small concerts, inviting local student artists to perform and other students to buy inexpensive tickets to attend.

Dunkle met the organizers of The Garden last semester, an off-campus stop on the house show scene, through SU. Partly because of their shared experiences as Setnor students, the organizers

invited Dunkle to perform at house shows.

Then came the task of assembling a band to support her in live performances, but once again Dunkle could rely on friends to connect her. Her band now consists of herself, two guitarists, one person on the keys, a bass player and Iapalucci on the drums.

Dunkle's setlists include a blend of originals and covers so that she can share her own music while still taking chances to let loose and keep the audience engaged with songs it already knows.

"Where'd All the Time Go" by Dr. Dog and Amy Winehouse's "Valerie" often feature on the set, and adapting those covers to fit her musical style gave Dunkle the opportunity to work closely with her band to develop its versions.

"What's nice about it is it's not really calculated, it's a natural, 'Oh, I hear this and I hear this,'" Anjali Engstrom, a guitarist in Dunkle's band, said. "After you get the musical concept down, then you calculate it and you time it out and you put drums in there and you time the vocals, and it's really fun."

The band rehearses whenever a concert is scheduled, with periodic rehearsals in reserved rooms at the Shaffer Art Building. Each rehearsal, Dunkle runs through the music with her band, either polishing an existing setlist or taking the time to learn new covers and originals. She also makes sure the band's rehearsal spaces are places where members can share their thoughts on how to adapt songs for covers or perform one of Dunkle's songs live.



Stephanie Zaso | Digital Design Director

With a back catalog of completed songs to choose from and new songs being written specifically for production, Dunkle has plans to continue recording and releasing music past this semester.

One of her current projects is an original song called “Human Condition,” which Dunkle says is lyrically her favorite song she’s written to date. The song was inspired by the time she spent home with her best friend on a gap semester and the peace she felt during those months, Dunkle said. “Human Condition” is also Engstrom’s favorite.

“The lyrics detail a very special friendship in real life and really formative experiences,” Engstrom said. “I love when an artist takes what makes them unique and puts it in their music, and I feel like she makes music that doesn’t sound like other people. She really puts her heart and her character into every song that she writes.”

Dunkle’s lyrical talent is one of the greatest strengths in her music, multiple members of the band said. Iapalucci said she focuses on telling a story, with the lyrics serving as a foundation for the rest of the music.

“I’ve never worked with someone that lyricism comes so naturally to them,” Iapalucci said. “Her lyrics have so much to them, and she has so many important things to say with them, and they’re just always so beautiful and raw.”

Dunkle knows she wants music to feature prominently in her life going forward, but she’s still trying to figure out exactly what form that’ll take. As a sound recording technology major, she’s preparing for a career in a studio producing music.

Her own music, though, will still be important in her life regardless of the path she takes. As she continues performing house shows and producing her own songs – and getting “Human Condition” ready for release – she’s focused on developing her sound.

“Every day, I’m just thinking about writing a new song,” Dunkle said. “I’m always writing a new song. Thinking about when I can start producing any song, it gives you purpose in your day.”



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