

Ali Gatie's music is intimate in a way that almost feels private. His feelings-first pop-meets-R&B is often vulnerable, wounded, and yearning—listening is less like thumbing through his diary than stumbling upon the pages he's ripped out and stuffed at the bottom of a drawer. And yet he pours his heart out, an approach that invites his rapidly growing fanbase to connect with him in a way that feels both cathartic and profound. Hits like double-platinum acoustic love letter "It's You" and his new EP, *The Idea of Her*, demonstrate how affecting such an approach can be—he shares the contours of his emotions in hopes that listeners can see themselves reflected.

This way of writing is almost second nature for Gatie. He grew up in the multicultural suburbs of Toronto after his Iraqi parents immigrated from Abu Dhabi. He shared a bedroom with his mother, from whom he inherited a loving appreciation for poetry. He learned that words had therapeutic power, something he's discovered more and more as he's grown as a songwriter. "What I like about poetry is you know who wrote the poem, but there's no face to the author," Gatie says. "The words have to have that much more weight to them to really make you feel something, and so, I try to do that with my music. Sometimes, I'll even cut the music and just read my songs and ask myself, 'Does this story sound good? Does it still make me feel a type of way?'"

When Gatie began recording in 2016, he was a self-described "underground indie kid singing heartbreak songs" in a hip-hop-obsessed Toronto scene. He knew he wasn't the type to catapult to fame through a flashy Instagram, and he wasn't out for industry affirmations. He only wanted to reach his people, and he did. Gatie had a simple formula: "If you just give me that chance and listen one time, then you'd fall in love. I just want one listen." Sure enough, the ones who tuned in have proven themselves incredibly loyal—Gatie lovingly calls them The LISNers. They come from all over the globe, something Gatie attributes to his own international heritage, and they connect with his raw emoting, seeing themselves and their place in the world through his songs.

Gatie's latest offering, *The Idea of Her*, intensifies the emotion and sense of connection he's become known for. "Every song is a different situation you might be caught up in while in love," he says. "It has the ups and downs, and the serious and not-so-serious, but it's not necessarily about one person. It's about the idea." The EP also expands on his stripped-down sound. Lead single "Can't Let You Go" adds an ancestral influence to the warm, forlorn ballad as he sings in his family's native Arabic for the first time. Gatie takes an even larger leap in "Do You Believe in Love?" featuring Marshmello and Ty Dolla \$ign, which comes on the heels of his first-ever collaboration—"Welcome Back" featuring fellow Toronto outsider-turned-star Alessia Cara. The upbeat anthem is undoubtedly his most purely pop offering to date. "I tried to show the world I'm not just a heartbroken dude who's gonna make sad songs on slow piano or guitar," he says.

These sorts of co-signs are new territory for Gatie, but he laid the foundation organically. "I built my fans one by one," says the artist, who made a habit of replying to every comment, DM, or Snap from day one. Four years later, after blossoming his sound on bigger projects like 2020's *You*, he's accumulated over 3 billion streams across platforms. Gatie isn't the type to care about such numbers, but it's evidence of the powerfully authentic bonds he's been able to form. "I like to look at The LISNers as this beautiful tree that gives me oxygen, which is my career, and if I'm not constantly watering my tree and taking good care of it then it will collapse one day," he says.

*The Idea of Her* is the ideal next step for both Gatie and The LISNers—a set of songs that underscores his unguarded approach to songwriting while emphasizing that there are new worlds out there to explore. "I want my fans to know I'm still figuring this out," he says of his next chapter, which will include a full-length studio album sooner than later. "I might not know for five or 10 years, but this is where I feel like I sit most comfortably. You can expect the unexpected."