

LAYA's boundless creativity is born from an innate desire to push herself. The Staten Island-born artist has worked as a singer, songwriter, producer, creative director, and visual artist—constantly shifting forms and acquiring new skills, because, for her, that's what growth looks like. She clings to a quote from an unknown source for guidance and sustenance: "You'll never have what you've never had until you do what you've never done." That powerful idea has always applied directly to her music. Her starry-eyed, vibrant yet vulnerable take on R&B and pop offers up a unique perspective on life and love, powered by a need for newness.

First, though, LAYA's looking back a bit. The upcoming release of her EP, *Um, Hello*, showcases her approach, swirling lively production with meditative songwriting. Songs like "Bitter" are relatable to anyone who has ever suffered through a failed friendship or relationship, but her tracks are buoyant and bright. Driven by elastic bass and sensitive vocals, the songs feel nostalgic and futuristic at once. "I love that I can bring back some classic energies that have been absent for a while," she says. "I definitely want to bring fun back into music."

That's abundantly clear in her first single of 2022, "Brag." LAYA's slinky '90s-indebted vocals echo through a minimal but booming soundscape as she issues a status check: "*Seems so sad, think of friends I had / Won't rub it in, baby, 'cause I got class / Don't wanna brag when I get the big bag.*" Then there's the song's esteemed guest, Fivio Foreign—a Brooklyn drill star thriving in an entirely new context. And let's not even get into the visual LAYA dreamed up (and created) for the song, which has her and Fivio doing their thing from within yearbook and prom photos.

LAYA's boundary-pushing approach began in her childhood. Her mother's side of the family is full of visual artists who have made careers of painting and sculpting—her great-grandfather made sculptures out of duct tape that found their way into art textbooks. Her father's side of the family is trained in musical theater and took pride in reenacting Broadway plays. "They were all poor Puerto Ricans, just creating art," LAYA says. "It's something I've always been around."

The abundance of creative energy surrounding LAYA led to her wanting to perform as early and often as possible. "I've been singing my whole life," she says. "When anyone asked me, 'What are you going to be when you grow up?' I said I was going to be a singer." LAYA's parents told her she'd habitually run onto anything that looked remotely like a stage and perform for anyone who was around. As she got older, she enrolled in theater camps and drama classes. While a genuine passion for music has been a part of her life from early on, LAYA didn't start recording herself as an artist until she was in high school. It was around this time that she also became a "graduate from the school of YouTube," where she pored over editing tutorials and learned how to use programs and techniques that she would go on to apply toward her future releases.

Over time LAYA became a self-described “daughter” of the iconic artists Missy Elliot, Beyoncé, and Brandy. In February, she offered homage to that trio with “Crazy Down,” which interpolates Brandy’s “I Wanna Be Down” over a sample of Elliott’s Beyoncé-assisted “Crazy Feelings.” The resulting fusion plays with nostalgia but also creates something totally fresh—a testament to her abilities to pay tribute to the sounds that inspire her while moving into new worlds altogether.

LAYA’s 2020 hit “Sailor Moon” offers a similarly familiar taste of ‘90s R&B, while still looking toward the future. Over light, airy production—courtesy of her longtime collaborators ORA (One Record Away)—she sings softly about a love interest, laying her feelings bare. In LAYA’s eyes, her penchant for harking back to that era represents not just her literal sound, but her mindset, and a connection to something deeper. “My music is something you’ve heard in a past life,” she says. “It’s new to you, but somehow it’s familiar. It’s an old, new-wave bounce.”

In addition to writing “Sailor Moon,” LAYA also shot, directed, and edited the visuals for the song, on top of doing her own hair, makeup, and wardrobe—skill sets that are core to her work and approach as a whole. “I’ve become the DIY queen,” she says with a laugh. “Anything that LAYA the singer needs, LAYA the handylady comes in and provides.”

That inclination to constantly create has given LAYA a leg up, in terms of her past, present, and future ambitions. A joint effort with ORA, *Um, Hello*, is a “beefed up” reissue of the 2019 project that serves as a time capsule from that era in her development, while also allowing the rest of us to catch up. Songs from the EP, like the flirtatious “On Sight,” reinforce LAYA’s playful nature, while homing in on her ability to craft tongue-in-cheek lyrics that rely on clever metaphors, as well as masterfully layered melodies that hover in the air long after the song has ended.

Her upcoming single, a charismatic cover of Missy Elliott’s “Sock It 2 Me,” will be available exclusively through Amazon Music Originals. LAYA’s version, which features her singing and rapping, is understated, yet riveting—an entirely new experience that represents her deep commitment to imaginative storytelling, and to placing herself in the tradition of culture-shifting R&B.

Building on these singles new and old, LAYA isn’t afraid to verbalize her desires within the music industry: She wants to win all the awards, perform in every corner of the globe, and succeed in any way humanly possible. “Everything that I’ve gotten to this point, I’ve worked for and made happen,” she says. “It didn’t exist yesterday, but it exists today.” And clearly, tomorrow.

While she's just setting out on her journey, LAYA's aspirations have been firm in her mind since she was a young girl. "My goal is to make an impact—to be that drop in the water, and have that ripple effect on the world," she says. "Those are the kinds of shifts I intend to create in music."