

In late 2019, the members of PRETTYMUCH found themselves ready for next steps: after having spent the last three years building up a catalogue of hits and a fan base that hung off their every word, the five-some felt a renewed sense of hope about the future. “Before, the music we made gave people a chance to fall in love with us as a group and as people and to really get to know us. Now, at this stage, we want people to fall in love with the music, because they already know who we are,” Nick Mara says over Zoom from the house four of the five of them still share in Los Angeles, complete with three studios and enough energy bouncing off the walls to power a small city.

Formed in 2016, PRETTYMUCH—comprised of Nick Mara, Brandon Arreaga, Edwin Honoret, Zion Kuwonu, and Austin Porter—has been hustling since their inception. Early singles like “Would You Mind” and “Teacher” got them noticed by popheads and critics alike, with *The New York Times* declaring, “The singing is mature, the attitude is poised, the eyes are on history”; later projects, like 2019’s *Phases* and *INTL:EP*, helped them achieve liftoff, building on the strong musical roots they’d set down for themselves as they worked their way to the top. They have sold out two headline tours and opened for Khalid and were named Artists to Watch by *Rolling Stone, MTV, Los Angeles Times,*with *Billboard* honoring them in their “21 Under 21” list three years in a row. They have partnered with A-list brands such as Puma (alongside supermodel Cara Delevingne), Kellogg’s Frosted Flakes, Moncler, FujiFilm, Hollister, and more. To date, the band have accumulated more than 1 billion audio and video streams, with a combined social following of 6.3 million.

But today, beaming in from all corners of the city, PRETTYMUCH are eager to talk about signing with Sire Records for their new EP, *Smackables*, a six-song collection that plays to their strongest suits and finds the fivesome embarking on a new chapter in their ever-growing story. “It’s the most authentic music we’ve ever released,” says Brandon. “We want to be the genre benders. We want to be the trendsetters. We want to be breaking the mold. And with this music, we’re finally doing that.”

Completed in their home studios during the pandemic, as the group used newfound downtime to creatively flex and swing for the fences, *Smackables* embraces intentionality and purpose as the driving musical force. “A really good song is timeless,” Edwin says. "Everything falls into place when we start loving every moment of it. That's been one of our goals: if we're making music, we're going have fun doing it. So leading up to this point, it's been preseason; now we're really about to go into the ballgame and do it the way that we've been meaning to do it.”

“Plus,” Nick adds, “the fact that we have three or four different studios in the house makes this feel less like work, less an obligation, and just more fun.”

Standout songs like “Lonely” and “Stars” showcase an emotional maturity and depth that’s come from years of the band hustling and learning along the way. Other tracks take the group light years into the future, like the trap-influenced “Corpus Christi” and title track “Smackables,” a singularly hype song that each member of PRETTYMUCH cites as one of their favorites on the project. “Parking Spot” takes inspiration from a rap battle the group was watching one day, and “Free,” the last song PRETTYMUCH finished for the EP, was written on Zoom and incorporates a live musician—a violinist Brandon hired in his producing role for the project—into their music for the first time.

On *Smackables*, PRETTYMUCH has brought together the best of several worlds—pop, R&B, rap, rock, electronic, soul, singer-songwriter—to make a record that’s singular in ambition, sound, and evolution. “Some of the songs on here, we were just making for pure fun,” Zion says. “To bring them back to the table and work on them together and release them, they’ve now become some of our favorite songs we’ve ever released. That’s an incredible feeling as an artist.”

Brandon—who stepped seamlessly into the role of the group’s principal producer, a skill he’s been honing since he was 12—says the new batch of songs, first and foremost, show off the best of the group’s songwriting and emotional growth. “The new music lets us show off our skills as a group and as individuals,” he says. “Zion gets to put his swag on stuff. You get Edwin and Nick and Austin doing their own things, too; we’re all finding ourselves while also creating the future of what PRETTYMUCH looks and sounds like. Where most people would get competitive, for us, it's about motivation. It's inspiration. it's something that continues to build. That’s special.”

PRETTYMUCH’s new leap into the future of the project involved all the members of the band taking a controlling interest in their own music, songwriting, production, image, and packaging. Now, they say, they’re excited to usher in the days of creative freedom, experimentation, and settling into their most honest and compelling era yet. “Music is so therapeutic for us,” Austin says. “We just want to make people feel good. The world's such a controversial place—but music is the only thing that, for us, just *isn't*.”

“With this new music, we're really starting to curate our own lane,” Edwin says. “We want people to listen to our music and be like, ‘That's a PRETTYMUCH song.’ Keeping that as our intention really helps set us apart from everybody else.”

With more music on the way as 2021 unfolds, PRETTYMUCH is starting the year off on the strongest foot possible, with sights set on dropping this project and returning to the road soon in the hopes of reuniting with their loyal fans to share new music with them in person. “I'm really proud of our ability to evolve and grow,” Nick says. “I'm just proud of us for not losing sight of the goal and if anything, pushing forward and evolving,” Brandon says. “But I think I'm most proud of *us*. I'm proud to be standing next to these guys.”