

Rainbow Kitten Surprise | Love Hate Music Box

In late 2022, Ela Melo was ready to throw in the towel on her career. A traditionally prolific songwriter and forever an endless well of creativity, for a while there, the Rainbow Kitten Surprise singer-songwriter didn't know where things were headed. "I don't know that I've got anything left in me," Melo recalls admitting at the time. If there was a principal reason for her dismay and terrifying uncertainty about the future, it was because Melo had spent much of the previous few years not only battling writer's block — unable to cross the finish line on so many song ideas with her Rainbow Kitten Surprise bandmates — but more seriously, she was deep in the throes of a serious battle with her mental health. And one that she now admits "caused problems: breakdowns on stage, tour cancellations etc.."

"I was fighting my brain," she says bluntly in reflection.

Thankfully for Melo — and more broadly, RKS and the thousands of fans who have come to adore the genre-bending, North Carolina-bred band — the singer-songwriter finally got the answers she'd long been seeking out: in May of 2023, Melo was diagnosed with bipolar disorder and began treatment and, wonderfully, she's since seen her life change for the better in previously unimaginable ways.

"Ever since that's been on the table, things have looked a lot brighter for me," the singer-songwriter says proudly one morning roughly eight months post-diagnosis. "I'm no longer fighting what I can and can't say." And as if suddenly struck by creative intervention, Melo concurrently began writing a batch of new songs; they poured out of her like never before. Her routine was to create one a day for an entire year, and she lived up to that bargain with herself. She'd once again found her creative footing.

The result of this hard work and personal determination is nothing short of astounding: six years following their acclaimed major-label debut album, *How To: Friend, Love, Freefall*, Rainbow Kitten Surprise now return on **May 10** with *Love Hate Music Box* -- a 22-track opus of an LP and a shining reminder to all who listen as to exactly why thousands of fans have been patiently waiting for this moment for more than half a decade.

Love Hate Music Box — the creative vision of RKS band members Melo, guitarists Bozzy Keller and Ethan Goodpaster, and drummer Jess Haney as well as former bassist Charlie Holt — represents a brand-new awakening, and one that fans have already made clear they've been eagerly anticipating.

Such evolution is directly reflected in the band's thrilling new music. While Melo says she was never afraid to plumb the depths of her psyche in music or take RKS' lyrics to undoubtedly intimate and oft-dark places, "Now there is darkness in the music but there's also light," she says with a smile when reflecting on *Love Hate Music Box* — an album that traverses fluidly through

genre, from pop (lead single “Superstar”) to indie-rock (the Kacey Musgraves-featuring “Overtime”) to electronic (“Peter Pan”) and even hip-hop (“Lucky”).

Haney says keeping fans on their toes as to what a RKS song might sound like has always been a thrilling proposition and is only amplified on *Love Hate Music Box*. It’s something, he says, he feels extremely grateful for. “We’ve been really lucky as a band to explore different sounds,” the drummer says. “It gives us the freedom to explore. We’re lucky to have that kind of grace from the fans. It’s helped us as a band to not be so scared to try something new or to break out of something we’re comfortable with. We’re expanding as a band in a wonderful way.”

“It’s hard for any artist to create the same music their whole career,” Goodpaster notes. “Everybody evolves and changes their sound over time. It’s not interesting unless you do that.

“It’s kind of like a re-branding for us,” adds Keller of *Love Hate Music Box*’s ability to toy with musical and stylistic convention. “A fresh start.”

And as reflected by the album’s highly-intimate lyrics, Melo is peeling back layers like never before. “I feel like an open book now,” says the singer reflecting on both her personal life as well as the intensely personal new album she recently penned. “I needed to make this record for me.”

To that end, so many of the songs that comprise the LP are highly specific, navigating the peaks and valleys of personal relationships— albeit often offset by upbeat, pop-leaning sonics. “I try to fight it but the tears keep coming yeah/I survived you but I still keep running damn,” Melo sings over chiming guitars and pulsing bass on the sprightly “Daddy Yankee.” Elsewhere, on “SVO,” with a simple piano line and 808’s bubbling beneath her, Melo intones, “Nights I’m losing sleep/Numb already babe/Nothing could get through to me.”

Getting to such a place of emotional transparency required Melo to have the utmost trust in her bandmates. Not to mention with the band’s producers. “He taught me to be proud of what it is that I have,” Melo says of Daniel Tashian (Kacey Musgraves), who along with Konrad Snyder and Melo produced *Love Hate Music Box*. “Daniel was like, ‘Let’s believe in these songs’” she recalls.

The rest of RKS concurs about the Grammy-winning producer’s undeniable impact on the final version of the LP. To hear them tell it, Tashian is not only a supreme master of melody but also of mood maintenance.

“This wouldn’t be a record without Daniel,” Haney offers. “Typically, in the past we may have been a difficult group to work with, but he found a way to work with us. That man is so good at what he does. It was just a fantastic experience working with him.”

Now, RKS is ready to take their emotionally electrifying new material on the road. The band,

who has played festivals including ACL, Bonnaroo, Lollapalooza, Outside Lands and have sold out over 100 headline shows - including three nights at Red Rocks - will kick off their spring tour on May 6 in Nashville, mere days before album release. Having taken more than a year off from the stage, it's an entirely exciting proposition for the band to be back in the live setting.

"It's one of my favorite things about being in the band," Haney says of performing live. "It's been a minute since we've had that." Adds Melo, upon expounding on how, like so much else in her life pre-bipolar diagnosis, live performance was a challenging task: "I can imagine it's going to be a lot simpler to perform just like everything else seems to be," she says.

As RKS looks to the future, Melo says she has never felt more creatively invigorated; she's still writing nearly every day and, as she says, "I'm keeping my nose to the grindstone."

"I'm all the things," Melo concludes of what lies ahead for Rainbow Kitten Surprise "I'm stoked, I'm nervous, but mostly stoked." She smiles wide. "It's going to be a lot of fun."