

To understand where Betty Who currently stands in her career, it's best to imagine her as she often stood as a kid: solo, in front of the bedroom mirror, belting out hits, dancing like *everyone's* watching. Because as the Australian pop queen walked away from her record deal and into her first independent album, she had a single mandate: "I am going to be the most me I can be." That is, in part, why her third full-length statement is simply called *Betty*. It's pure her: a brilliant swirl of pop—'80s, Y2K, and hyper-modern strains—that encompasses everything from intimate artful fare to darkly sexy bangers to full-on wedding reception shout-alongs. What's more, these are songs about grown-woman emotions delivered by someone who rediscovered the drive and verve that fueled her rise through music in the first place. As Betty says, "It all came back to joy."

There's a reason Betty was tapped to remake the *Queer Eye* theme song for the uplifting series' second season. It's the same reason she's soundtracked *Pitch Perfect* and made the *Glee* cast swoon, and that a certain legendary flash mob proposal video went viral to the tune of her 2012 debut single "Somebody Loves You." Joy has always been in the music, but for Betty herself the feeling had faded. "I didn't understand how damaging it was to feel like I was never living up to expectation," she says of her time on a major label. "When you're in the middle of it, you think it's driving you. When I came out the other side I realized, no, I was devastated." She wanted to handpick her team, sink or swim by her own choices, and share music while it's fresh. With *Betty*, she did all of that and made an album that, as she puts it, "I'm more proud of than I could possibly say."

The world got a taste of that with Betty's first independent single "Ignore Me," an uplifting ode to moving on set to warm, indie-tinged electropop. Likewise, synth-streaked dance cut "I Remember" takes on something sad—the dissonance that can bubble up in a relationship—and finds the sweetness therein as Betty coos, "*I don't want perfect, I want you.*" Our heroine not only split from her label in 2017, she got engaged, and the thrill of realizing you could spend your life with someone rings out on "Marry Me." The song's exuberance was inspired by the unabashed pop (namely Katy Perry) Betty loved as a teen. Meanwhile, the vintage JT-evoking "All This Woman" addresses a would-be lover but is really about Betty's acceptance of her own body: "This is me saying to the man or woman I'm standing opposite, 'This is what I want and you're crazy if you don't want it too.'"

These songs spilled out with a similar assuredness—among them, early teaser "Taste," which Betty has described as "a little rock 'n' roll with just a touch of vampire fetish," and *Betty's* first official single, the achingly up-close, acoustic-powered "Between You & Me." The process began in sessions between runs of her famously vibrant, intensely choreographed tour. She'd planned to write more when she came off the road, but instead realized she already had an album's worth of songs she adored. So rather than iron them out in high-profile studios around Los Angeles, she absconded to a rental in Palm Springs with her two of her best friends, artist/producer Pretty Sister and decade-long collaborator Peter Thomas. They finished *Betty* in 10 days between shared meals and streaming sunshine. "It was one of the best times of my life," recalls Betty. "I swear I'll never make a record any other way."

But that setting conjures the beginning of Betty Who, when the woman born Jessica Newham studied cello at Berklee during the week, then took the first train out to Providence so she could spend all weekend inventing her sound at classmate Peter's family home. And that hustle itself mimics a theme of Betty's childhood in Sydney: while her classical training began at age 4, she devoted every free second to Britney, Christina, *NSYNC, and MJ. The voices, the moves, the lyrics, the spectacle—she ate it all up, especially that feeling the best pop gives you: "When you hear it," says Betty, "and go, 'Oh my God, you literally wrote this about me.' I've wanted to make

music like that ever since." In that spirit, *Betty* gives us what we need most right now: an excuse to dance in the mirror, license to trust our instinct, and knowledge that joy is never too far away.