

# Franklin Jonas

## *Sewer Rat*

**S***ewer Rat* is a bold and unforgettable introduction to Franklin Jonas' bewildering world of sound. The songwriter and producer's debut album is impossible to pin down in the best way, as Franklin rifles through the music of his life like a true cratedigger only to emerge with a singular sound that defies easy categorization. Merging hip-hop's rhythmic gait, the anything-goes perspective of classic indie rock and a colorful sampledelic approach, *Sewer Rat* is the sound of falling in love with sound as well as a thrilling suggestion of what's to come from Franklin.

The album's eleven songs represent the culmination of several years of soul searching for Franklin. The youngest of four, he spent much of his adolescence bouncing between Los Angeles, Dallas, New Jersey and beyond, never really fitting in anywhere.

After graduating high school at age 15, Franklin enrolled at Belmont University for film, but shortly thereafter shifted into music and beatmaking, crafting samples directly from vinyl and deep diving into the world of music production at the Academy of Art in San Francisco. Later he would study audio engineering at Blackbird Academy under mixing master John McBride (whose distinctive voice appears at the beginning of first single "Cocaine").

He took a break from music to continue his studies in New York and during that time,



photo credit: Henry Komaros

he accidentally went viral on TikTok. Becoming disenchanted with online success, he left the country to backpack for five months and upon his return, the songs that became *Sewer Rat* started to make themselves known.

“I’d written songs for myself but hadn’t really done anything with them before,” Franklin explains. It was Clint Michigan, a one-time counselor and fellow musician, who encouraged him to pursue his creative streak. Together the two worked on an idea that became the album’s stomping, expansive opening track “Grow Up.” “It brought back that feeling of wanting to make music again,” he recalls.

Franklin continued to write and refine songs in private, eventually showing his work-in-progress to a peer who put him in touch with the guys behind Pizzaslime Records: “They heard something in those demos, which was so fulfilling. There’s no way I would be releasing this if not for their encouragement.”

Feeling energized, Franklin linked up with Charlie Brand of Miniature Tigers, who had just come off of working with Weezer—a providential coincidence, given the band’s classic *Pinkerton* was among Franklin’s first-ever musical obsessions alongside Florence Welch, Beck, Daft Punk, Dennis Wilson and Odd Future. In the studio, Franklin and Charlie unlocked the world of *Sewer Rat*—named for its mission to be the perfect soundtrack for riding the subway—together, first opening up “Grow Up,” which set the intention for the rest of the record.

*Sewer Rat* finds Franklin digging into his past and parsing struggles with depression and mental health throughout young adulthood. “So much of this record was therapy for me,” he explains of the album’s themes of shame, self-acceptance, and forgiveness. “These songs were the only way I knew how to get my feelings out.”

Although some of its original demos date back to 2017, *Sewer Rat* was largely recorded last summer and fall as Franklin and Charlie drew from a bevy of foundational influences—the frenetic bombast of The Prodigy, the synth-y zest of Passion Pit, Ringo Starr’s solo output, Bon Iver’s electro-acoustic experimentation—to craft these indelible tunes.

“It was great to really zoom in and distill all these influences into the music itself,” Franklin says, while discussing what made him realize “I could make the music I want to make with the tools in front of me.” You can hear that sense of re-discovery in the deceptively lilting twang of lead single “Cocaine,” which features Franklin’s distinctive croon over a twinkling sample as he recalls microscopic details from his days of higher education and hijinks in Nashville—with a current of reflection running through its lyrical preoccupations, too. “‘Cocaine’ is about longing for the coping mechanisms you don’t have or can’t do anymore. It’s the point where you become nostalgic for the bad times because even the bad times had good distractions,” he explains.

With resonant piano and expert sound design, “Hoboken” strongly evokes the fresh confusion that new love brings, while “Cherub” possesses a deceptive fatalism under its sleek, peppy indie-pop chassis. Then there’s the stomping psychedelic odyssey “SF,” which was inspired by a period of Franklin’s Bay Area-residing life where he “Went down a hallucinogenic rabbit hole” and came out of the other side to tell the tale. “I found the good, the bad and the ugly,” he recalls. “There’s so much nihilism in the need to escape, and I was lucky enough to find my voice within that.”

Above all else, the vibrancy of these songs makes *Sewer Rat* an immediately infectious listen, a record that recaptures that feeling of hearing great music for the very first time that changes your life entirely. “What would I have done with my life if I’d heard music like this when I was 16?” he reflects while talking about the album’s overall thematic aims. “Maybe my life would’ve been different. At the end of the day, this album is about hope.” *Sewer Rat* undoubtedly captures complicated emotions in thrilling detail, suggesting that there’s nothing stopping Franklin when it comes to what’s next.

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