

UDU Bio

Lowertown finally caught their breath. Over the last few years, the New York-based duo of **Olivia Osby and Avsha Weinberg** was teetering on the brink. From constant touring and a separation from their label to creative frustrations and an unhealthy attachment to one another, their artistic partnership and, more importantly, their friendship were on shaky ground—especially since these experiences were colored by the disorienting intensity of their late teens and early 20s. It became clear that the two had to revisit their roots.

Those roots sprung in Atlanta, Georgia, in the forests, in the soon-to-be abandoned venues, in makeshift punk communities, but their roots also strengthened somewhere else entirely: on the internet. The band grew up on **Tumblr** fanpages, **Reddit** forums, digital spaces that had not yet been corporatized. They were able to observe and take part in music, anime, and film fandoms that grew stronger in these ungoverned places. So much so, that the fandoms leapt from the virtual to the physical, bringing people together to meet at concerts, coffee shops, and conventions to discuss their obsessions and connect over shared interests. During the pandemic, they watched these spaces change, become commodified, and disappear; people no longer had these physical spaces to be solely amongst friends with shared interests where communities and fandoms could strengthen. Out of this vacuum, the **Ugly Duckling Union** was born.

Inspired by the conceptual creativity of bands like **Gorillaz** and the emphasis on the communal concert experience of **Fugazi**, Lowertown's new album, fittingly titled **Ugly Duckling Union**, is the conceptual world of Dale the duckling protagonist and his companions as they attempt to band together to defeat LBH, a tyrannical media corporation set on separating and isolating in their pursuit of control.

Through the band's online connection with fans, their Discord server with channels for their community to share their own art and talk to the band, and their Instagram and Youtube pages, where they have built a cult following, they have already begun to bridge the gap between the digital and physical. Lowertown shows are often giddily attended by those who have met through their web of online fandom. **Ugly Duckling Union**, accompanied by a conceptual story, a playable Minecraft world, a handbook, plush dolls, and drawn comics by **Doctor Nowhere (Silas Orion)**, is creating the space to be obsessed together again.

The tumultuous beginnings are in the rearview mirror for Lowertown, as we hear in the first seconds of the opening track, "**Mice Protection**", Osby's composed exhale, a symbolic moment that sets the scene for their most thoughtful, uninhibited, catchy, and eccentric collection of songs.

Songs like "**Big Thumb**" epitomize just how far Lowertown has come. In an unkempt folk-jazz murmur, Weinberg slurs his words with palpable heart, while Osby's lush vocal melodies and harmonica encircle to haunting effect. The song was written after an hour-plus jam on 12-string guitar and harmonica, and its impressionistic lyrics came from newspaper clippings. The funny,

country-tinged “**Worst Friend**” was also the result of a playful writing style, arising from a spur-of-the-moment decision to trade bars about a *Malcolm in the Middle* episode, wherein a character goes to AA to make his family think he’s working on himself, despite never having a drinking problem. Then, there’s “**Cover You**,” a gorgeous, pastoral, and largely instrumental number with intricate fingerpicked guitar and mournful flute—a teaser of the LP’s more ambitious second half.

Lowertown are perhaps best known for their affecting musings on the melancholia of youth, always captured with biting honesty. But on *Ugly Duckling Union*, that anguish is funneled through a more mature, detached, and humorous lens. Weinberg describes their previous lyrics as “knee-jerk reactions,” compared to the more considered and self-aware writing of this LP. “**Mice Protection**” pokes fun at Osby’s tortured inability to make decisions, “**Forgive Yourself**” is a blunt yet compassionate meditation on shame, and “**I Like You a Lot**” is a rare Lowertown love song, detailing the physical sensations of infatuation.

While working on the album, Osby read a lot of Carl Jung, the famed psychologist who wrote extensively about the “shadow self,” and in a similar spirit, they describe the album’s back half as “the witch half.” It’s a more zoomed out, existential, and dreamlike Lowertown.

Ugly Duckling Union was fully written, recorded, produced, and mixed by Osby and Weinberg, and that insular, hands-on ethic is something they cherish—and has never waned. Although Lowertown are the sole caretakers of their art, their new album title is a celebration of the meaningful community they’ve built. “Our home has been the people who make us feel understood, and the music that makes us feel understood,” Osby explains. “I feel like Avsha and I have just been two misfits doing stuff together, and I feel like this music is for people like us—it’s for the misfit toys.” There’s a lot of freedom in being an outsider, and that’s ultimately what *Ugly Duckling Union* is about—finding and freeing yourself through community. And what could be more freeing, self-confronting, and funny than making a beautiful record with your ride-or-die, misfit-toy best friend?