

Σtella (Greece / Sub Pop)

Making her Sub Pop debut with the mesmerizing *Up and Away*, the Athens-based painter, visual artist, and performer Σtella (aka Stella Chronopoulou) presents a vintage-flecked pop paeon to the pangs and raptures of love. Exploring growth, change and her personal and musical journey so far, it proves Heraclitus was right; you never step in the same river twice.

“Its title comes from the opening track, “up, up, and away we go”! My excitement levels had hit the roof! I felt like I was flying!” Σtella declares. For a Greek-born, English-singing songwriter, Σtella’s prospects for a viable long-term career within her home country’s traditional landscape once appeared slim, but she remained positive. “I was happy doing what I love; making music I’ve listened to my whole life,” she says. Now, Σtella’s Sub Pop debut *Up and Away* emerges from Athens and London after a long-haul recording session with London-based producer Redinho, that found her rediscovering the 50s and 60s record collection her parents raised her on.

“Growing up I loved playing ‘Sousourada’ by Nikos Gounaris on my grandfather’s old gramophone. I was thrilled by Greek folk-pop artists like Grigoris Bithikotsis and the great Tzeni Vanou, as well as international artists like Tony Motolla and Julio Inglesias,” she remembers, among other sounds; “Living in a close-knit community by the mountains and sea, I vaguely recall being woken by neighbouring shepherds’ sheep bells... everything back then was so pure and innocent!”

Whilst painting at Athens School of Fine Arts, Σtella began writing and uploading her songs into the wild of the Internet. Her debut EP *Keep Me Naked* riffed on the free spirit of the American and Greek mid-century pop she discovered in record stores as a teen; from *I’m Your Baby Tonight* era Whitney and NOW compilations, to The Doors and pop prowess of Fleetwood Mac, Kate Bush, Queen, Annie Lennox, and George Michael. Founding member of bands Fever Kids and CHEST, Σtella’s primitive synth-based numbers etched out her place. Releasing self-titled 2015 electro-pop debut *Σtella* and her 2017 LP *Works For You*, buzz and airplay beckoned, making her one of Greece’s most popular indie stars. Σtella is now a sought-after collaborator, writing, and singing for Greek underground artists – not to mention soundtracking the athletes’ parade at the first European Games in Azerbaijan, racking up a million Spotify streams, plus international festival appearances.

Walking or cycling around Kypseli’s lively neighbourhood, you will find Σtella perusing the market, checking out the hardware store tools on her beloved Athinas Street, or making music in her HAVABANANA studio. Joining forces with artist and producer Tom Calvert (aka Redinho) was a match made in Athens after he caught one of her gigs on a visit to the city. *Up and Away* took shape after their mutual appreciation for Khruangbin, Elias Rahbani, and Aris San gradually inspired them to capture the authentic sound of Σtella’s home country. The rest, as they say, is Ancient history. “*I’d been listening to old Greek folk/pop songs and was ready to dive into new musical territories. Tom had a similar desire of creating a vintage sound. Instantly stars aligned; I was time-travelling, singing songs as The Chiffons or The Crystals would.*”

Ever the storyteller bridging past with present, Σtella designed herself and Tom as medieval bards on *Up and Away*’s artwork, inspired by medieval woodcuts of musicians. “There were one or two interesting things going on in my life, but we won’t be going into those..., I was in a very emotional state at the time,” she says.

Following recent self-produced LP, *The Break* (released on Montreal's Arbutus Records - Grimes, Majical Cloudz, Doldrums), *Up and Away* is a record of two halves moving between an all-consuming affair and deeper love. Stella's honeyed vocals are offset by dizzying blasts of Christos Skondras' bouzouki improvisation and Sofia Labropoulou's dreamy kanun, whilst vintage drums and bass are particularly foreboding on 'Another Nation' which has all the bravado and confidence of an artist who is happy to be stepping out. With a dewy whistle, "Titanic" describes a journey to the unknown and recites names (John Borie, Laura Mae) from a list of survivors of the sunken ship, before 'The Truth Is' leaps forward to acceptance ("*alright, but still I miss you every night.*"), 'Who Cares' topples into a boozy coping mechanism ("*in a bottle we all fell*"), and closes with the reflective 'Is It Over.'

Like a rarity unearthed, *Up and Away* captures the conflicting emotions of love as it lives on in ways beyond our understanding or control.