

# At 15, Juniper Shelley forging a retro-inspired musical path

By BRETT MILANO

When 15-year-old Juniper Shelley last went to a high-school dance, she gave the DJ a song request: She wanted to hear "Friends of Mine," from the Zombies cult-classic album "Odessey & Oracle," recorded 35 years before she was born. Not surprisingly, the DJ didn't have it on hand.

Is it any wonder she wound up making her own record?

For lovers of classic pop, the album "Juniper" is one of the coolest things to come along this year. The songs are bubbly and infectious; celebrating crushes, good

music, roller coasters and other teenage kicks. As a singer she's got charm and charisma, sounding like a younger and happier Liz Phair.

A New Jersey native, Juniper is the daughter of music journalist and radio DJ Michael Shelley, and the two made the album together. It's one of the inaugural releases on Fabcom, a Boston-based label run by local music fan and Harvard Medical School psychologist Tony Bram — who says he first became aware of Juniper when she recorded IDs for her dad's show on Jersey's great non-commercial station WFMU.

Michael first turned Juni-

per on to the '60s and '70s music she loves, she noted in a father/daughter Zoom interview last week. "I'm used to people being surprised that I like that kind of music," she said. "I grew up hearing the Beach Boys and the Go-Go's in our kitchen, so that kind of thing became ingrained in me. It's just music that makes me smile and has good lyrics, the Zombies songs have a lot of great stories. It's weird to like things so different from what my friends are listening to but I like some modern things too, like Taylor Swift."

"She's always been singing, just around the house or walking down the hallways

in school," Michael said.

And while some of her schoolmates made it into songs like "Everybody's Got a Crush on Chad," she at least changed the names. "That's based on an actual kid, but there's no way you can figure it out — I hope," she said.

Michael has the job of turning Juniper's ideas into songs. "My dad is the driving force but I think I'm the inspiration for most of it," she said. "We just took a legal pad and wrote down things we wanted to see represented in songs — things that were missing from the teen-aged point of view."

Added Michael, "She only

had two rules about songs: No writing about technology, and no statements about kids today, explaining a certain generation. Though we wound up breaking both of those rules."

Michael also pulled in the all-star backup cast: members of the Mekons, Yo La Tengo, the Smithereens and Fountains of Wayne, all sending in their parts during the shutdown.

"It's funny to be the only girl on the record, and the only person under 50," Juniper said. Also included was one of the last songs, though a fun and upbeat one, written by Muffs leader Kim Shattuck, who died of ALS in

October 2019. "That was emotional because my dad had such a close relationship with her. I just felt I was lucky to get such a great song."

So far Juniper's only played one live show, before Christmas in 2019. More shows and a followup album are possible, but she says she doesn't have her sights on a long-term singing career.

"I like making music with my dad, and it wouldn't be the same doing it by myself," she said. "We've definitely got more response than we expected. My only thought making the record was, 'This will be fun and we'll give it to Grandma.'"



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

**SELF-EXPRESSION:** Singer Juniper Shelley, 15, has released a self-titled album that recalls classic pop.