

POP FLASH.



Since blowing up in 2017 off the success of a song he self-released as a high school student, “[Idle Town](#),” Conan Gray has been moving through the kind of whirlwind, life-changing chaos that most young pop songwriters dream about, and is now just days away from releasing *Kid Krow*, his major-label debut. What’s most surreal to Conan, though, is that he spent his life dreaming about this day, and now that it’s finally here, he’s having a hard time accepting that it really happened.

“I would tell seven-year-old Conan that he successfully tricked millions of people into thinking that he was good at writing songs,” Gray laughed, when asked about letting his past self know about his current success. “I’d be like, ‘You did it, you did it! You tricked them.’ But I think I’m still very much in a state of wanting to do a good job, you never know when things like this will disappear. And I’m not the kind of person who half-asses something, If I like something, I’m obsessed with it. So I don’t think I’ll ever get to a point where I let myself fall into this dream.”

The dream began, as so many do, with a young, gifted child stuck in an unhappy home. Gray’s childhood was not only turbulent due to his parent’s divorce, but included abuse, and frequent moves before his family settled in Georgetown, Texas when he was in sixth grade. Lacking support and centering at home, Conan began creating videos and drawing his life experiences to express himself, first starting with videos at the age of nine and uploading them to YouTube for posterity’s sake. But as he embraced YouTube, a growing audience there quickly began to embrace him back, following along with his journey and multiplying exponentially over the years.

At first, Conan was happy just to have an audience that cared and a

community to be connected to — but eventually, said community morphed into a full-blown fandom. Writing and drawing gave way to songs and videos, and when he was 17, the homemade music video for “Idle Town” was the culmination of everything. For his audience, who spent the last decade or so watching him emerge, and for newcomers, it was impossible not to get sucked into the charismatic forcefield of this fully-formed independent creator.

— Caitlin White, Uproxx Pop Critic on how [Conan Gray blew up off the strength of one track to become a fearless Gen Z pop star](#).



NUMBER ONE STUNNERS



RODDY RICCH

Remember the time before Roddy Ricch's "The Box" was the only song in the world? Yeah, me neither. As Ricch's manic, squeaky anthem continues to show up at the No. 1 slot on the *Billboard* chart, his streak is coming closer and closer to achieving the same success as Lil Nas X's unstoppable 2019 track "Old Town Road." Now hitting its tenth week, "The Box" continues to reign supreme. But, Dua Lipa is hot on its tails, as her new hyper-disco banger "Don't Start Now" inched up to the No. 2 slot. Watch this space, because Dua might just be the one to take apart the box.

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BUBBLING UNDER



HALF WAIF

Indie pop breakout Nandi Rose Plunkett has been slowly creating an intimate synth-pop empire for herself as Half Waif. Her new album *The Caretaker* is a finely-tuned meditation on how and why we care for ourselves and others, what drives us and what lurks beneath the surface in our friendships, romantic relationships, and family ties. Using a shimmering, self-styled palette of digital production and pairing it with

sleek, imagist lyricism, Plunkett establishes herself as a songwriter walking in the footsteps of greats like Joni Mitchell and Kate Bush — all while producing her own sonic soundscape.

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REMEMBER WHEN

HAPPY BIRTHDAY LYKKE LI!



Later this week Swedish pop goth-goddess Lykke Li is celebrating her 34th birthday. Breaking out in 2008 with her stunning debut *Youth Novels*, brittle synth-pop hits like “Little Bit” and Li’s smoky alto immediately put her on the map. Following that up with 2011’s *Wounded Rhymes*, 2014’s landmark record *I Never Learn* and 2018’s *so sad so sexy*, the singer-songwriter has become a pop legend in just over a decade and shows no signs of slowing down.

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LOVE LETTERS



KEENAN

Fans of Melanie Martinez' 2019 album *K-12*, or G-Eazy & Bebe Rexha's collaboration "Me, Myself & I" are already up on producer Keenan — aka Michael Keenan Leary — who is quickly establishing himself as one of the go-to creatives in the pop music space. Working with the likes of Skizzy Mars, Linkin Park, Madison Beer, and Mod Sun, Keenan is a quickly-rising force who is beginning to develop his own signature sound that's a coveted co-sign for rising pop acts.

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