

CLASSICALLY TRAINED SINGER AND MULTI-INSTRUMENTALIST HANNAH BUSSIÈRE KIM, BETTER KNOWN AS LUNA LI, FIRST SHOT TO FAME DURING THE EARLY DAYS OF THE PANDEMIC WITH A SERIES OF TIKTOK JAM SESSIONS FILMED DIY-STYLE IN HER BEDROOM. NOW, SHE IS TOURING THE WORLD, HAVING MADE HER DEBUT PERFORMANCE IN SINGAPORE AT THE WOMEN-FRONTED MUSIC FESTIVAL, THE ALEX BLAKE CHARLIE SESSIONS, THIS FEBRUARY. IN AN EXCLUSIVE SHOOT WITH *FEMALE* DURING HER TRIP HERE, THE TORONTO-BASED INDEPENDENT MUSICIAN CASTS ROCK STAR GLAMOUR IN A REFRESHING NEW LIGHT.

TEXT KENG YANG SHUEN PHOTOGRAPHY STEFAN KHOO STYLING DAMIAN HUANG

RAD MOON RISING

F 80



Technical jersey jacket, silk-blend shirt, cotton pants and silk tie, Dolce & Gabbana

Luna Li is quintessentially now. Probe her on what she thinks makes a rock star, for example, and her answer is the antithesis of the hedonistic labels typically associated (unfairly or not) with the term.

"I think that the narrative around the rock star has changed so much," she tells *Female* in an interview just hours before her set at The Alex Blake Charlie Sessions music festival at Pasir Panjang Power Station – her first performance in Asia – three months ago. "My band members and I are not typical rock stars in the way they used to be in earlier times. When we're touring, we try to go to bed early, make sure to eat healthily and cut down on drinking because being on the road is rough and can be really exhausting."

Self-care as the new sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll? Trust a zillennial (she is of the generation, but declines to reveal her age) to establish that. That aside, the story of how Luna Li – the stage persona of Korean-Canadian artiste Hannah Bussiere Kim – emerged onto the scene is also one that is only possible today: in a digital world that has endured its first global pandemic.

The Toronto-born and -based musician, you see, rose out of the malaise of Covid-19 in early 2020 like a euphonious, Y2K-chic fairy with a series of DIY video clips that she had intended as her "quarantine project". Each recording – all still up on her social media accounts – depicts her as a one-woman orchestra in her bedroom, weaving together charming, feel-good jams using multiple instruments: guitar, violin, bass, keyboard and even the harp (yes, she plays them all). During those dark days, her polyphonic melodies came like sunbeams, but she never expected them to go viral the way they did – or where they would take her.

Since then, she has toured with the likes of her idol Michelle Zauner – lead vocalist of indie pop band Japanese Breakfast – and launched several EPs. Last March, she released her first full-length album, the dreamy 13-track *Duality*, which earned a nomination for the Alternative Album of the Year at the 2023 Juno Awards – Canada's answer to the Grammys.

The title of the LP is a pitch-perfect reference to the many dichotomies in Kim's life – and life in general – including her attempt to mesh her background in classical music (her parents run a music school in Toronto) with her own growing interests in pop, rock and R&B. (She eventually dropped out of university, where she majored in the violin.) Then there is her mixed Korean-Canadian heritage that has always left her feeling like "a bit of an outsider" growing up in predominantly white neighbourhoods – a sentiment that would build when she started exploring Toronto's male-dominated rock music scene.

This sense of alienation and under-representation fuelled Kim's determination to work with women – especially women of colour – on *Duality*. Guest collaborators include Filipino-American dream pop singer-songwriter Jay Som and Filipino-British alt-rock sensation Beabadoobee on the tracks *Boring Again* and *Silver Into Rain* respectively. (To get hold of them, Kim reveals that she simply tried today's version of cold-calling: by sliding into each musician's DM.)

Ultimately, *Duality* is a coming-of-age snapshot of Kim's life and psyche. "I'm too young for my age / too shy for the stage / too careful to be brave," she sings in *Silver Into Rain* – an honest acknowledgement of her introverted personality. The creation of Luna Li – a moniker inspired by her fascination with the moon and its "feminine energy" – is in fact her way of separating her "more quiet, shy and chill" private side from her increasingly public one. Judging from her over-an-hour-long show at The Alex Blake Charlie Sessions, she has perfected balancing the two.

Throughout the performance, Kim – or should we say, Li – delighted the crowd with her musical prowess and effortless charisma, occasionally pausing to share about her album or introduce her bandmates with a winsome mix of enthusiasm and bashfulness. As she puts it herself: "What makes someone a rock star is, quite simply, their attitude. Anyone could be a rock star if they wanted to be." She, without doubt, has all the makings of a great one.



Silk dress and Fendi First nappa leather boots, Fendi



PHOTOGRAPHY ASSISTANT: CHONG NG STYLING ASSISTANT: DANESSA TONG HAIR: EC TAN/KIZUKI+LIM MAKEUP: KEITH BRYANT LEE,
USING MAC COSMETICS LOCATION: PASIR PANJANG POWER STATION SPECIAL THANKS TO: 940W15



(On both pages) Tweed vest and matching skirt, and patent leather gloves: Gucci