

Hana Malhas's Summer of 'Love'

The Amman-based artist's latest single garners international recognition, award nomination

JORDANIAN-BORN SINGER-SONGWRITER Hana Malhas began writing solo material in Michigan back in 2008. How she came to be there is a familiar story for Arab artists: She went to the States to study business. "It seemed like all my friends were applying to business school at the time," she says. "I thought, 'Hey, that's what I should do...'"

Turns out she was wrong. "Yeah. But here's the thing; I think even wrong things happen for a reason," Malhas says. "Right now, my life is split between business projects – for paying the bills – and a music career. And for a personality like mine, it works well."

It might not be too long before her music career helps pay the bills too. This year, the song "How We Love," from her EP *Hana Malhas and The Overthinkers*, was one of five nominees in the Folk/Singer-Songwriter Song category of the Independent Music Awards. It's a slow-burning tale of the "aftermath of the final fight in a relationship," picking through the "rubble, dust, debris and sadness." Malhas lost out to Passenger's widely acclaimed "Let Her Go" when the panel of artists judging the awards made their decision (the winner of the public votes has yet to be announced), but she wasn't disheartened. "It's *such* a good song," she says of the winner. "It feels great to be recognized in that kind of company. I feel really honored."

Although she's only been composing her folk-tinged piano-driven material seriously for a few years, the 34-year-old has been playing piano since she was a kid. (She was classically trained on both piano and violin.) "I was at a chamber music camp when I was 16," she says, "and up until then I'd never seen a live show that wasn't an orchestral performance. One night, there was a 'skit night' – kind of like a high-school talent show. The bass instructor – a tall man with a white beard – got up and played a spoken-word song with just his bass. I was in complete awe. It's like a switch went on, and I realized just how much of a storytelling medium music could be."

She started ditching math classes to write songs on her piano. "The songs were really bad at first," she says. And it would be another 10 years or so before she really decided to make music a "serious part of my life."



LOUNGE SINGER
Hana Malhas

Now, inspired by – among others – Cat Stevens, Joni Mitchell, Bon Iver and Ray LaMontagne, her songwriting is garnering attention both at home and in the States (Malhas divides her time pretty evenly between Amman and Michigan) and she's pulling in more live shows. The *Overthinkers* has become a catch-all name for "anyone I play with." Malhas will take the stage alone (with piano and guitar), or with up to three others, depending on who's available. "It seemed like the most suitable name for my type of personality," she says. "And my type of music. And, as it turns out, also the type of listener that's drawn to it."

Live, she says, she prefers the energy that comes "even when there's just one other person." But it's been difficult to find "steady" partners for her music. Particularly female musicians. "I've met a

few, but nobody to actually form a project with."

Her summer schedule is light right now; just a show in Michigan, one in Jordan and a tentative date in Dubai. She plans to use the next few months "trying to focus on writing some new material and experimenting with some new sounds." She's keen to add some electronica to her songs "and figure out how to get more of that into a live show, even if I'm playing alone."

She's also hoping to license some of her music to TV shows or films. A documentary crew has already approached her about using one of her songs. "That's a world I'd love to get into because I love the effect that a show or movie has on me when the soundtrack is awesome," she says. "I'd love to be part of that."

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