

A Conversation with Star Moles

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Star Moles is the moniker used by singer/songwriter Emily Moales. Hailing from New Hampshire, she has since come to be known as a kind of Garageband wizard, creating thoughtful, fantastical-esque music that mixes psychedelic rock with a fairy tale-like charm. Moales put out her debut record *Camelot* in 2017, with *The Magic of Believing What You See* following in 2019, both aided by producer Kevin Basko (Rubber Band Gun). Her most recent EP, *Drop Out*, was released this past fall.

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I read somewhere that your musical journey started at Vacation Bible School. Can you talk a little bit about that? Was music something you always knew you were going to do?

During summer vacations when I was in elementary school, my family and I would usually visit my grandparents. My cousins and my brother and I would all go to vacation bible school, which was basically church summer camp at my grandparents' church. There was always a song and dance aspect of that, so that's one of my earliest singing memories. My grandma was also one of the most musical people in my life. She loved to sing and she really liked Julie Andrews and *The Sound of Music*. She really inspired me when I was a little kid. As for whether music was something I always knew I was going to do, I'm not sure, but I've definitely always loved it. My favorite activity when I was little was listening to music in the car while being driven somewhere. I think it's still my favorite activity, actually.

You've stated movie scores and early indie music as some of your influences. Are there any albums or films in particular that defined you or helped you develop as a musician/songwriter/Garageband connoisseur?

I really love the *Lord of the Rings* books and movies. I used to teach myself all the songs on my keyboard, which was how I practiced playing most often and helped me get better at the instrument. My keyboard is primarily what I use for writing songs. I'm realizing I like the songs I write on the keyboard better than the ones I write on the guitar. My music taste was influenced by what my parents listened to, and often by the soundtracks of ski movies. Me and my dad got into Wolfmother's self-titled album after we heard the song "Mind's Eye" in the ski movie *Push*. I think it plays during the menu screen. That's a sick album; it takes itself so seriously, which is kind of badass. I don't know if I can hear its influence in any of my music, but I hope it's there. I feel like the album that has most influenced my songwriting and the kinds of sounds I like is *Oracular Spectacular* by MGMT. I have probably listened to it more than anything else. Similarly to how practicing playing songs from the

Lord of the Rings score helped me get better at the keyboard, I think listening to MGMT probably helped me get into recording my own music and informed how I went about that.

Your music also feels extremely literary, with the characters you create/reference, and the worlds you build. Have books/literature/stories impacted your songwriting in any way?

For a long time, I wanted to be a writer. I've tried to write books before but I can't come up with anything that long. Writing songs is sort of the perfect solution to that problem. A lot of the content I end up writing about does tend to be very centered around characters and worlds. [When you're] reading books, also, you just find so much stuff that makes for cool lyrics. I went through a *Jane Eyre* phase that resulted in some songs, and I went through a T.H. White's *Once and Future King* phase which basically resulted in *Camelot*. I'm going through a dark period right now where all I read is *Game of Thrones/A Song of Ice and Fire* which I find absolutely not at ALL inspiring and I PROMISE no one will have to hear any songs about *Game of Thrones*. But because I take inspiration from books, I think I tackle writing songs the way I would writing a story. It certainly feels like I am writing a scene with characters and a setting and a narrator and some semblance of a plot.

It's been a pretty big year for Star Moles. Your second album, *The Magic of Believing What You See*, came out this past summer. What was it like recording with Kevin Basko again? How did it differ from the process of making *Camelot*?

I learned so much from recording *Camelot* and learned so much again this time! Kevin is really good at what he does and is the best person I can think to learn from. The process itself was smoother because I knew the routine a little better. We recorded *The Magic of Believing What You See* in a cabin in the mountains of Pennsylvania, and I think this time around our setting definitely had a big impact on the resulting project. The stream by the cabin marks the beginning and end of the album, and in "Home With Joan" you can hear birds during the verse after the first chorus. That's maybe my favorite thing on the album. The vocals on "Growing" were recorded with the windows open as a thunderstorm was starting/ The wind [was] blowing into the room, which luckily didn't mess up the recording. I feel like it definitely affected the way I sang the song. In addition to all that, we didn't leave the property the whole two weeks I was there. I feel like the cabin fever vibe is there. It was like we were wizards doing our spells and rituals secluded from civilization.

Take us into the process of writing/recording *Drop Out*. Do you think being away from college has influenced your music or perspective in any way?

Drop Out was sort of the accompaniment to my thoughts and emotions before, during, and after dropping out of school. Some songs were written and recorded before I went back to school for my third semester, some during my brief time there, and some post withdrawing. I'm in a limbo-y kind of place in my life since leaving school, [and] the songs I've been writing have been about more current and personal things than previous songs. I rarely use lyric writing to try and work through problems

because in the past that's made for lyrics that I don't like, but that's the natural course my writing is taking. This time, it's sort of working and I don't hate what I'm coming up with!

You recently had your Star Moles debut, and in New York City of all places! How did that first show at Baby's All Right go?

It went really well! The show at Baby's All Right was one of the coolest things I've ever done. I hadn't performed since high school and have missed it so much. My set took less time than it was supposed to because I haven't figured out what I should say to an audience between songs yet. It was a really lovely place to perform. It was kind of crazy to be there onstage because I have been watching videos of some of my favorite bands and artists playing shows there for years.

How did you go from being a fan of bands like Foxygen and the Lemon Twigs to getting to play a bill alongside Jonathan Rado and the D'Addario brothers?

It's really hard for me to believe that any of this is real. The thing is - Foxygen and Rubber Band Gun and the Lemon Twigs and Jungle Green and other bands and artists in that sort of sphere inspire a lot of their fans to make music too. I guess that's true of most great bands. But it's different with these guys. They realize that people are inspired by them and they are, in turn, genuinely supportive of anyone they hear making music that they like. I could get really corny and talk about how I think there's a 60s-like movement going on with music right now, and how it's like this in all different niches or "scenes," but I feel like it's not. I live in New Hampshire at the moment where there's nothing going on, so I'm not really in the middle of whatever's happening. I think that in itself says something about the encouraging and supportive attitude of all these bands. They all just like each other's music and want the world to hear more of it. So even though I live so far away from anything, I've still had these opportunities. It's thanks to some very cool and kind people who make really good music and who appreciate good music. That is definitely tooting my own horn some, but oh well!

Who do you think everybody should be listening to right now?

I think everyone should listen to the band Glue Trip. I just found out about them. They're a Brazilian psychedelic band, and their song "Old Blood" makes me cry. I also think everyone should listen to the Beach House album *7*. I missed it when it came out in 2018, but it's my favorite album right now. Also *Titanic Rising* by Weyes Blood because it's maybe the best album ever.

What does the future look like for Star Moles?

I really want to play more shows, but I also really want to have a band. I'd like the idea of Star Moles to involve more than just me. I want to be a member of Star Moles: The Band. If I had a whole band backing me up live, I think I would have the confidence to put on a really crazy show.

If you could create your ultimate dream line-up, who would you include?

I gotta be honest - I think my dream line-up would just be if all my closest friends from home suddenly played instruments and wanted to be in a band with me. [There's] literally nothing cooler than being in a band with your friends. I do wish I could meet Enya, though. She's way too cool to be in my dumb band, so I would want to be in her band. I'll play rhythm guitar for Enya. There has definitely never been rhythm guitar on any Enya song ever.

Lastly, what's the weirdest fact you know about star-nosed moles?

Their "star" is the most sensitive organ in any mammal. I didn't know that it was called their star and not just their nose, which is cute, despite the fact that they're not cute at all. Also, apparently, they eat faster than any mammal on earth.