

# MALLRAT

## It's Good To Feel Small Sometimes

By Brodie Lancaster

Grace Shaw has been living a double life. The pop-rap artist spent her final two years at high school—the ones that her teachers said would be the most important for her future academic career—desperately waiting for graduation, when the music she made under the pseudonym Mallrat could finally be the thing that consumed her days.

“It was super frustrating; I felt like I was wasting my time,” she tells me now, a week after her 18th birthday. “I would wake up at 5am to do babysitting before school so I could afford to go to a studio. When I got home from school, I’d fall asleep and then wake up and write music until early in the morning, and then I’d have a little sleep and get up for school again.” It’s no wonder her bio on Twitter and Instagram describe her as “Hannah Montana of the rap game”.

Onstage, Grace is a diminutive powerhouse with long brown hair that hangs like a curtain down to her waist and giggly banter delivered between sophisticated and self-assured songs about daily minutiae and feeling weird at parties. The first time I saw her perform at Brisbane’s annual music showcase and conference Big Sound—think: a tiny Australian-themed version of SXSW’s music program, only without the cargo shorts-wearing tech bros and verbose nocturnal film-lovers imposing on the shows—I saw a teenage girl behind the DJ deck start playing my favourite Run the Jewels track. I’d eagerly moved towards the front of crowd by the time that track mixed seamlessly into one by Kanye West. Right at the time I assumed this Mallrat character my friends had insisted I check out was a dope, bespectacled teen DJ, Grace bounded on stage wearing one of the merch t-shirts from the Yeezus tour. The shirts were designed to be oversized, but Grace’s could’ve passed for a dress.

“It’s good to feel small sometimes,” she tweeted a few days later, upon encountering the sculptor Anish Kapoor’s piece UNTITLED 2006–07 at the Gallery of Modern Art (GoMA) in Brisbane, with her friends who were visiting for

Big Sound. “It’s this huge big tube and you’re meant to stand next to it and it makes you feel super small,” she explains when I do the most annoying thing a journalist can ever do, which is ask someone to explain a funny social media post. “So it was a very physical thing in that context, but I actually do think it’s good to be small, like a little ant. They’re the best animals. They see everything and they’re so strong and they’re always plotting and scheming away.”

Next week, Grace’s scheming will take her to LA, where she will be taking meetings and writing in the studio for different artists. She hopes to be based from the city soon enough. When she gets home, Mallrat will embark on a national tour in support of Australian hip-hop outfit Thundamentals, and over New Year’s Eve they’ll play Beyond the Valley Festival, which is headlined by Chance the Rapper. This little ant be plotting.

Mallrat’s DJ that night at Big Sound, it turns out, was Denim (her real name), whom Grace met at school, and who lives in Mackay—a 12-hour drive away from Brisbane—from where she commutes any time they have a gig to play. The second time I saw them play, the event was more corporate, with hectic branding and a higher proportion of industry types than had been at the last show, which was filled with locals and friends Grace waved at and shouted out between (and, sometimes, during) songs. It seemed like Grace was maybe a little less comfortable on this stage than she had been a couple of days earlier—maybe that’s true, or maybe I was mistakenly projecting my own loneliness and social anxiety onto her—and during one track, Denim grabbed a mic, emerged from behind her station, and kept her friend company on stage. Grace loosened up almost immediately, and the song ‘Uninvited’, with its chorus of “I have to play excited / But I wish that I was uninvited / Get me off the list / I’ve got nothing on my wrist,” hit just a little harder.

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