



Alexia Webster

HEAD'S UP SJSU grad and rising rap star Nappy Nina gets way inside the music on new album.

GOOD MOURNING

Nappy Nina finds power in grief on the inspired 'Mourning Due'

BY ETHAN GREGORY DODGE

LYING ALONE ATOP a white pillow in a vast expanse of desert is the head of Nappy Nina.

Surprisingly not photoshopped, the image captures the Brooklyn-based rapper buried in sand in the Sahara Desert. It was originally meant as the single cover for the track “Tucked In,” but Nina decided it was too good. It deserved to be the face of her sixth and latest album, *Mourning Due*.

The album’s double entendre title came to Nina during the racial justice protests of 2020.

“Seeing folks around me in deep, deep mourning and seeing Black

lives clearly not meaning much to the larger society, I was thinking of mourning as a currency,” she says. “What do we do with this sense of sadness and with all this grief and anger?”

With hers, Nappy Nina chose to make her strongest album yet. *Mourning Due* beautifully explores the grief of the last few years, along with other facets of her personality, identity and lived experience, hooking any empathetic listener across its 14 tracks.

Nina moved to San José to attend college at 18. Here, she found a freedom she hadn’t experienced before. That freedom soon enabled

an intense phase of self discovery. As a young, queer Black woman whose high school teacher had publicly outed her two years earlier, she felt a need for community. She soon found one among other Black students.

“Hanging out the quad with all the Black fraternities and sororities is an experience I’ll never forget,” she says. “It just showed me what other ways Black people exist besides the ways that I knew in my small community.”

When Barack Obama was elected president during her first semester, those same Black students celebrated around the John Carlos and Tommie Smith statue in the center of campus.

“It was a super powerful moment to experience,” she says.

The Oakland native began rapping at the young age of 15, and found a home for her rhyming talents in the now defunct biweekly San José Poetry Slam at MACLA.

“At poetry slams, you get to perform the same poems over and over and over and perfect them to a T,” she recalls. “I won about once a month or so.”

Despite her repeated wins, she never felt quite confident in her poetic prowess—something that carried over into her hip hop career.

“A lot of times I’m making records with a sense of urgency, like I’m trying to prove myself,” she says. She is confident, however, that her work on *Mourning Due* is her best yet. “I’m a lot more sure of myself [now]. I think you can hear it in the record.”

Local hip hop head and *Dad Bod Rap Pod* co-host Nate LeBlanc agrees.

“I think it’s pretty clear that she is getting better as a writer and MC with each successive project,” he says.

He notes that Nina avoids the “braggadocio,” or boastfulness many other rappers rely on. “She approaches the music from a more humble, humanistic, relatable place than many of her peers.”

Nina addresses this directly in the album’s track “Amen,” rapping: “Braggadocio, it’s easy n-words . . . the bar y’all set is so low . . . tell your lil’ rapper friends I will not engage.”

But what LeBlanc sees as humility, Nina perhaps sees as self-doubt, having struggled with mental health issues most of her life. It’s a theme she says spans all her albums.

“Unfortunately, I think it comes from the lack of affirmation I got growing up. No fault to my parents, because I see them as whole people and understand that they were growing up at the same time I was growing up. But I wasn’t affirmed as an artist or as a creative person when I was younger.”

However, she also attributes this to her success.

“I’m here because of it,” she says. “So I’m grateful for that. I could be like completely overconfident and making trash music.”

In 2021, her mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. Due to the pandemic, she was unable to make the trip from Brooklyn while her mother underwent chemotherapy here in the Bay Area. On one of the album’s most poignant moments, she pays out her own grief in full, rapping: “My mama got sick in the coast I was not in. 🍷”

	MOURNING DUE
OUT NOW	Nappy Nina
	nappynina.bandcamp.com