

Exclusive Interview: Poppet, rising star of eclectic electro-pop  
by Rae Botsford, for LiveByMedia.com

Note: This is the unedited version of the article, as the LiveByMedia website is currently down.

Olympia resident Molly Raney may be a nanny by day, but by night she becomes [Poppet](#), the vibrant, eclectic musician who creates "fully-orchestrated electro-pop for the Age of Sincerity" and "noise for an infinite future." She sounds like Björk (if Björk were an American whose best friend was Peter Pan), switching expertly from hyper-playful futuristic songs to shockingly beautiful melodies. Poppet is about to release her first full-length album, *The Blue Sky Is Always Blue*, and has invoked the crowdfunding power of Kickstarter to get the money for the printing (which you can find [here](#)). In this interview she talks energetically to Rae Botsford about music, inspiration, lighting things on fire, and why she never drives to the store.

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**Rae: So, why Poppet? Why is that the name?**

Poppet/Molly: Well, it could be a long story, but basically I like the name Poppet because there's so many layers to it. [It has] childlike innocence, because it's old English for a small girl child or literally a doll. The original poppet is this pilgrim doll, very simple, that I got when I was twelve years old at some pilgrim colony on the east coast and I always called it the most beautiful doll in the world! [laughs] Poppet is old English for a doll, and it's an affectionate term for a female, but it also has connections to magic and voodoo. Voodoo dolls are also called poppets, so there's definitely this sinister side to it and I really like that — it's playful but there's this sort of ominous darkness as an undertone that has an intensity to it. The [Kickstarter](#) is for my first album, so it's got a lot of my early material on it which is very very playful, but these days I definitely am embracing the dichotomy a lot more. My live shows are an extremely intense experience. [laughs] I definitely have that side going now, maybe more than I did in the past, but I guess it's always been there.

**R: How are your live shows intense? What happens there?**

P: I feel like my live shows are the best representation of Poppet that there is, because I put a lot of work into them. I do mostly solo now, but I basically have my little electronic setup which is like keyboard, loop pedal, delay pedal, drum pad, sometimes two loop pedals, but I've got this wireless headset microphone so I can move around. I have a lot of mobility. So I'll start a loop and then I have the freedom to just go around and do some performance stuff as well. I'm a super diva [laughs] so I just get really intense, especially because a lot of the material I'm performing now is stuff from the last year, last year and a half which was really hard for me. I was in a really bad relationship, so there's all these intense emotional songs that come out. When I'm performing them I go back to these moments. I do some stage stuff, like I'll paint myself or I'll take off my clothes [laughs] there's usually costume changes, at least one costume change. Or I'll light something on fire, or a candle — sometimes a candle, sometimes I'll light a symbolic piece of paper on fire or something.

**R: So what do you do when you're not Poppet? You have your Poppet side and your Molly side—**

P: Yeah, Poppet is like this wedge of me that's very extreme, that gets magnified. One of the things that people say to me who sort of get to know me — they see me live first, they see Poppet first, and then they get to know Molly, and they're weirded out because they're just like, "Oh, you're so different as an actual person!" [laughs] But anyway, in my day-to-day life right now I work as a nanny, and I've done that for many years. And I really like cooking. I am pretty OCD with my cooking projects right now, and it kind of goes in a cycle of what I'm really focused on. I've been doing a lot of canning recently. I

also do embroidery; for the album there's an embroidery piece for every song, and that was a big project for a while. And I like to bike. I'm very strongly for using my car as little as possible. I use my car for work to transport the boys I take care of, but other than that I try not to use it unless I'm going out of town. I'll take my groceries — I never, never drive to the store [laughs]. I'm a very determined person, so I have these weird little things that I have to do a certain way, so I always have to bike to the store. And so my cooking projects and food in general is a big passion. Basically the only literature that I read now is all about food politics, food systems, the food system in the United States — I feel very strongly that our food system is corrupt, and I hope someday to be able to have an impact on the system in a positive way. But that would involve going back to school. If I didn't do music, I would have to put a lot of work into focusing on that.

**R: Let's talk about your new album, *The Blue Sky Is Always Blue*. You have songs on there from the course of a five-year span, during which time it seems you've been a very prolific songwriter. So, what inspires you?**

P: I started writing music in 2008, the genesis of Poppet was end of 2008, so most of these songs are coming from this period where I was figuring out what my sound was. It makes sense to me, I guess, that I was writing a lot of music just because there was so much to write. I had never written anything before, so it was just like — endless possibility. I have a lot of different influences, but at the time I was going to a lot of house shows in the Davis area — which is where I'm from, in California — and so I was constantly being inspired by these little house shows and the community radio station KDVS, a freeform radio station. At the time that a lot of these songs were written I lived alone and I was going to school and I was also working as a nanny and I was just in a really good place, I was really happy, really excited about writing music. Because I had my home setup all these recordings are so lo-fi — of course they've gone and been remixed and mastered by my friend Bob, who is an excellent audio engineer; he's done a really incredible job with me, painstakingly redoing every single track, just polishing it up — but anyway, they were all done on my iMac computers with the computer microphones so it was just super easy for me to just sit down and like — go. And I didn't live with anyone so I there are times when I would come home at midnight and write a song until four in the morning [laughs]. When I get focused on something I kind of just get on a roll and can't stop, so when I started writing music I just kept going and going. Because I was in a learning environment, because I was at UC Davis, and I was just going to these shows there was just so much for me to write about, so much inspiration.

**R: And how do you get from that initial inspiration to completed song?**

P: The process of songwriting — well, it's changed significantly since I started, 'cause I now have about four albums backed up worth of material, and this fall I'm hopefully going to finish recording the other three. But the songs on this album, everything's very loopy, so it'll often start out with a loop that I just generate either on a loop pedal or — at the time I was using Garageband, or whatever audio digital workspace I'm using. Then from there I will just build harmonies and layers around it, and then eventually — it's not very linear, I feel — most of the songs are not very linear in the way that they come to be. The song that appears in the Kickstarter video, "The Crustacean," I have a very distinct memory of how that one got written because I was just like, "This one's gonna be a good one" [laughs] when it came to me! But I was at a house show and I was thinking about my boyfriend at the time. I was in Davis and he was thousands of miles away, he was halfway across the world in Nepal. I was at this house show listening to this band and then all of a sudden this chorus line of, "You are my booo-ooat!" came into my head and it got stuck in my head. When he was little his mom used to call him Ev-Boat so I used to call him Boat too, so it was just this sort of affectionate little line and it got stuck in my head at this show and I came home. It was no more than that one little line, but then a couple days later probably I went, I sat down and just started. A lot of times I'm fiddling around with synthesizers,

and that will determine what the whole song is like. So I came up with a chord progression after that which goes throughout pretty much the whole song, and then I came up with a lot of different synth lines. Like, I'll come up with one synth line, and then I'll do all these sort of, *sort* of counterpoint-like harmonies that go along with it. I just really remember thinking of that line in my head, and thinking of this really bumping pop song with these beats and really upbeat synths.

**R: So you do have a very unusual sound and seem to have a lot of musical influences - what can we expect from you going forward? Are you settling into a certain style, or still playing with a whole bunch of different things?**

P: I feel like my music is evolving all the time. I don't have much new stuff available on the Internet, but there's a couple of songs at the top of my SoundCloud which I think sound a lot different from what you hear on *The Blue Sky Is Always Blue*. A lot of that has to do with me moving from California to Olympia, Washington. I do feel like I'm constantly honing, but I feel like I have settled into a sound somewhat. But I always want new inspiration and new influences and different ways of approaching writing music. I always am hoping things come out differently! [laughs] I feel like it's very — so, there's Björk and then there's Kate Bush, and these are like my two *ladies*. [laughs] So I feel like my music is going more in this sort of Kate Bush direction these days, but right now I'm really interested in experimenting with — like I grew up, I trained as a coloratura soprano, pretty much, a very very high operatic soprano, and so I feel like my earlier stuff I was kind of trying to push away from that. I was like, "Oh, I had all these years of training, and I just wanna write pop songs that are really more simplistic," but now I feel like I'm really trying to focus more on, "Well, my voice is the main thing that I've got" [laughs]. That's the thing that I feel is my best instrument, basically. So I'm really focusing on melody now, and on rhythmic complexities through the melody and just very melismatic, kind of all over the place. My more recent stuff is a lot more focused on the melody rather than the instrumentals. But it's always been very vocal-centered; it's just become more extreme, you know, as time goes on.

**R: So what's up with the plastic tricycle — like that particular phrase, the thing — why "plastic tricycle?"**

P: There's this whole theme in a set of my songs that is all about consumerism, and how there's like this whole consumer apocalypse that I have this vision of happening because it's so over the top and it's just gotten to this breaking point. I feel like we're just on the tip of this giant pile of shit that we've accumulated and we're about to go avalanching down into [laughs] some like horrible apocalyptic situation! And I feel like the word "plastic" is a great example of a material that's just so wasteful and so prolifically available and a part of our culture and a part of our consumption, and so the word "plastic" appears in a lot of songs that are all in this sort of cluster of songs that are about American consumerism, loosely. In general I find plastic to be somewhat gross, but of course at the same time I say all these things I'm still an American. One of my good friends was like, "People can be self-righteous, but at the end of the day, we're all still Americans, we're all still consumers, we're all still hypocritical," so I definitely feel that. Because of course, all of my music equipment has massive amounts of plastic and so many things in my life — but I sort of have a thing against plastic in some ways. I don't know, I hate plastic bags. [laughs] I have a weird thing against plastic bags. So I guess that word represents the negative parts of consumerism a lot, to me. With that song, though, that song is a lot more playful, but the idea of the plastic tricycle is just sort of this gross, like those horrible — in the music video, just this horrible ugly plastic tricycle that every child owns at some point. [laughs] So there's that, and then there's the idea that it's a *child's* tricycle, so making it a plastic tricycle gives it this childlike element because that song is mostly about my childhood. The spoken word part in the middle of the song is a word-for-word recount of this dream, the first dream that I had when I was two and a half years old. So that's where the original inspiration for this song came from. I guess my brother was having a dream about pirates; he had a bad dream and he was telling my mom about it. He was four and

I was two and a half and I said, "I had a dream too, Mom!" so I told my mom about this dream that I had about this pirate coming into my bedroom. She thought it was really cute and she wrote it all down and made this picture, this drawing to go with it. I still have that drawing in my bedroom at home in Davis. So that's where the original inspiration for that song came from. But there's that whole other element that I [laughs] wandered around with — yeah, as I described before.

**R: Do you make your costumes, or — where do you find them?**

P: Actually, even before I thought that I would ever do live performances I started gathering costumes and I get them from anywhere and everywhere. Most of them are vintage dance costumes that I find on Etsy, or on eBay or at vintage stores or thrift stores, and I will search for hours and hours and hours to find some of them. And some of them I do modify. I've started putting embroidery on some of my costumes, and I'm working with a woman who does costume design who is gonna be presenting at this festival in Sacramento. She's gonna design a costume for me and possibly two other dancers. I'll be doing a performance, but it's gonna be in the fashion showcase section of this festival so I'm gonna be on a runway, but I'm gonna be performing as well. I'm hoping to do more collaborations like that in the future. I myself am not a very good sewer, but I would love to work with more designers so that I can actually — again, I'm just honing all the time, so to be able to create costumes that actually replicate the music — that's the goal [laughs] eventually. And all the stuff on the first album when I was writing and performing it, it's all these tap dance costumes and ballet costumes and ice skater dresses that are very glitzy with sequins and spandex and neon colors. So that is definitely an important part of Poppet as well, is crazy gaudy costumes.

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Help Poppet out on Kickstarter at <http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/989959670/poppets-first-full-length-album>, check out her website at [www.poppet.us](http://www.poppet.us), or listen to her music at <https://soundcloud.com/poppetsblackbirds>.