<http://www.npr.org/2017/02/12/514094122/after-wowing-pharrell-maggie-rogers-delivers-her-pop-thesis>

LOURDES GARCIA-NAVARRO, HOST:

Maggie Rogers kind of made it big last year when a video of her and a certain happy music producer went viral. That producer was Pharrell Williams. That video, which has had more than 2 million views, shows Williams looking thoroughly surprised and incredibly impressed as he's listening to a demo of Maggie Rogers's song "Alaska."

(SOUNDBITE OF SONG, "ALASKA")

MAGGIE ROGERS: (Singing) I was walking through icy streams that took my breath away.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: Maggie Rogers was attending NYU's Tisch School of the Arts. Williams was there to critique the students' work. Let's just say he only had praise for Rogers.

(SOUNDBITE OF VIDEO)

PHARRELL WILLIAMS: But I've never heard anyone like you before. And I've never heard anything that sounds like that. So that is the kind of thing that - like, that's a drug for me. That was cool.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: And now Maggie Rogers is about to release that song and more on a new EP called "Now That The Light Is Fading." Maggie Rogers joins me from NPR West in Culver City, Calif. Thanks so much for being with us.

ROGERS: Thank you so much for having me.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: OK - got to talk about that Pharrell moment. This is how...

ROGERS: (Laughter).

GARCIA-NAVARRO: ...Millions of people got to know you. What was that like?

ROGERS: Well, I think what's so incredible about that video is that I was able to speak before my music was played. I was able to talk about my music. And it's really strange when a moment that is so intimate about my life and my career is shared so widely with the internet.

I mean, I really was just kind of showing up for school that day. I didn't know Pharrell would be there or that there'd be a camera crew. And so it's pretty strange - the sort of small moments where my life has changed so drastically.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: Yeah - and played out, you know, for millions of people. Let's hear about the other side of your music, which is - uses a lot of nature, use a lot of natural sounds in your music. Let's listen to the final version of "Alaska" that made it onto the EP, that song that Pharrell heard and loved.

(SOUNDBITE OF SONG, "ALASKA")

ROGERS: (Singing) I was walking through icy streams that took my breath away, moving slowly through westward water over glacial plains. And I walked off you.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: So what are some of the natural sounds that we're hearing here that sort of evoke Alaska?

ROGERS: Well, I don't know if it evokes Alaska specifically. I titled it "Alaska" because the song sort of represents everything that happened in my life surrounding a hiking trip I took for a month in Alaska. But as far as the natural sounds go, specifically, I went into this project thinking about it like a thesis in pop music. And my goal, really, was to make pop music feel as human as possible. And so you can hear it specifically in the percussion. It's made up of snaps and claps. But the main rhythmic loop is just me patting on my jeans.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: (Laughter).

ROGERS: (Patting leg). And in the pre-chorus, instead of a synth, there's a morning dove. You can sort of - (imitating dove cooing).

(SOUNDBITE OF SONG, "ALASKA")

ROGERS: (Singing) So it seemed.

And there's voices in the beginning that I've sort of pitched down so that you can hear people talking in the background.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: So what happened on that hiking trip to Alaska that was so pivotal?

ROGERS: I went on this hiking trip right after my freshman year of college. And I was 19. And I think that's a time in a lot of people's lives where you experience a lot of change. And it definitely was for me. And I had had all of these new experiences in New York and didn't really know how to process them. But the sort of process of walking - I found such an incredible meditation and personal rhythm to sort of walk into this new part of my life.

(SOUNDBITE OF SONG, "ALASKA")

GARCIA-NAVARRO: You released two albums before this latest one. And they have, like, a more folksy sound. Let's listen to the song "Satellite" from your album "The Echo."

(SOUNDBITE OF SONG, "SATELLITE")

ROGERS: (Singing) Steady as a rock, I stand. I wait with eyes that see, with eyes that can't erase.

It's funny. I haven't heard this recording in so long. I made this song when I was 17. I went to high school at a place called St. Andrews in Middletown, Del., and was really lucky to have such incredible teachers who helped me explore this thing that felt so urgent for me.

(SOUNDBITE OF SONG, "SATELLITE")

ROGERS: (Singing) Oh, and I have long since seen the sun. It set along the banks when I was young.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: Yeah. This was five years ago already that that album came out. So you've been doing this for a long time. I read that you really changed your sound when you took a trip to Paris.

ROGERS: Yeah. That's true. I studied abroad my junior year of college. I was lucky to have a bunch of friends from NYU that were native Berliners. And, you know, when I arrived at NYU, club culture was something I just really didn't understand - or really just didn't resonate with who I was. And I think I also had a very strange impression of it.

You know, as a freshman at NYU, I thought going to the club meant high heels and expensive drinks. And it just wasn't something that I felt really resonated with me. But I remember so distinctly when a friend of mine I was visiting in Berlin - and she said, you have to wear sneakers, or else they'll know you're not there to dance. It was the first time I had ever sort of seen and felt dance music almost as a form of mental health, as this incredible - so much joy and so much release.

And I sort of started to understand dancing as, like, the most primal way you can feel music as a human. And I realized how much I was missing it. You know, I had made such quiet, slow, emotional music my whole life. And I was just really ready to be loud.

(SOUNDBITE OF SONG, "ON + OFF")

ROGERS: (Singing) Take me to the place where you always go when you're sleeping or your day takes you low - so low, when I'm on and off again, on and off again, on and off again.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: Let's talk a little bit about your three music videos because I'm curious. As a young woman in this industry, these videos - fully clothed with a lot of women around you. Is there pressure to look a certain way? Were you trying to not look a certain way? I mean, is there sort of control over your image as a young woman in the pop industry or in the music industry generally?

ROGERS: I'm really just trying to be me. Those clothes that I'm wearing and those people in those videos - those are just my clothes and my friends. And I've had so much fun making music videos because I didn't really realize until I was asked the question, you know, what does the narrative for this song look like?

As soon as I was asked I was like, oh, well, of course, it's like my four friends in the woods. And I have pink eye shadow, and my hair is crimped. And in this other video, we're going to go to my summer camp. And I would like a white, bedazzled jumpsuit with yellow fringe, please.

(LAUGHTER)

ROGERS: It was so incredibly...

GARCIA-NAVARRO: Really? That's what the conversation was?

ROGERS: It was so clear. Like, duh. There has to be yellow fringe. Like, what else would I be wearing? But I've been - the music video for "Alaska" was so funny because we shot it at my family's house. And I spent my entire life inviting all my friends over and forcing them to make music videos with me.

(LAUGHTER)

ROGERS: And then to actually get to do it was just like - what a blast.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: I mean, when you did that video at your family house, were your parents like, oh, we totally are used to this? She's been doing this since she was a little girl.

ROGERS: I think at the core of all of this, I'm a college graduate with a job. So my parents are thrilled.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: Maggie Rogers - her latest record is "Now That The Light Is Fading." She joined us from our studios at NPR West in Culver City. Maggie, it was an absolute pleasure to talk to you.

ROGERS: Thank you so much for having me.

(SOUNDBITE OF SONG, "DOG YEARS")

ROGERS: (Singing) I count my time in dog years, swimming in sevens, slow dancing in seconds. And I'm the one that loves you. And I'm the one that loves you. I spend my time daydreaming...

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