



**Laugh,**

**cry,**

**lose**

**your**

**breath**

**An interview  
with Celaviedmai**

**Words by Kelly Doherty  
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**M**aïmouna Salif, also known as **Celaviedmai**, is an artist that's overdue her flowers. The Galway performer, whose stage name combines the French phrase *C'est La Vie* with her first name Mai, has been bubbling under for many years. Kickstarting her career with support slots for international artists such as Lil' Wayne and Mac Miller, she has earned a name for herself through electrifying live sets and brief but impactful singles.

Having just released *Both Sides of the Story*, a belter of an EP that fleshes out the flashes of skillful songwriting she's displayed hitherto, Celaviedmai is entering the next stage of her career with a whole new approach and a live band in tow. "My vibe has completely changed," she explains whilst discussing the impact that the COVID-19 lockdown has had on her music. "Humbly, respectfully, I've always been a powerhouse on my own but I've got a live

*Both Sides of The Story* is steeped in multiplicity. In less than 13 minutes, Celaviedmai establishes herself as a nimble hand at spoken word, sultry jams, pop hooks and brash bangers. She even manages to try her hand at the contemporary emo revival. It's a release that surprises and refuses to pigeonhole its maker. For Celaviedmai, this range is an integral part of her character as an artist. "Each song tells a story," she says. "It's the story of who I am and all the elements of me that make me whole". "Exploring" is key to her art, and she rejects the notion of "minimising [her] work to stay in one genre".

Spoken word is one element of exploration that is visible on *Both Sides of the Story's* opening track 'Positive Movement'. This avenue is something that arises from the outset of her career. "When I started doing music, I was young, and I didn't know how to go about it.

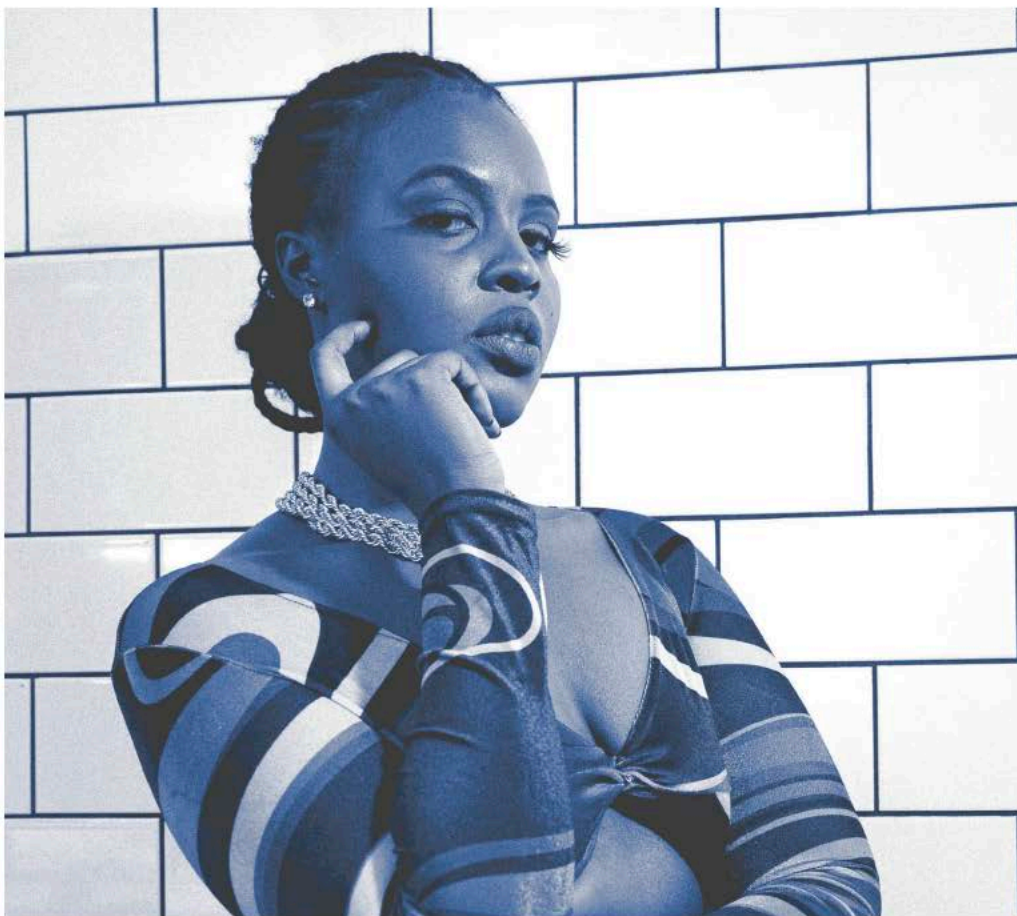
**“Any artist that talks to you and says they make their pay from doing music full time is probably a liar.”**

band with me now and my instrumentation is just a lot more focused. Having a band behind me gives me an energy I can't explain. People are going to laugh, cry and lose their breath when they see me play".

Despite a robust list of live performances under her belt, until recently, Celaviedmai had a thin discography spanning a handful of promising singles and collaborations. *Both Sides of the Story* was, therefore, a long time in the making. "The first song I worked on was back in 2019," she explains. "I had a hook and a verse, but I started working with Alan [McKee, collaborator] and everything came together across 2021. Before then I had loose ideas but I developed a mindset and wanted to counteract people perceiving me as a hardcore rapper. I wanted to show the different sides of myself."

I didn't have any resources and didn't think I could be a rapper, so I thought I'd be a poet instead," she laughs. These days, Celaviedmai has figured out how to be a musician but still identifies with poetry: "I write my songs like poems. A lot of the time they might be very short and I don't really use much structure - it's just feeling after feeling after feeling".

The EP looks inwards at love and healing, but also puts the external world to rights. On the rousing closer 'People Issues', Celaviedmai asserts that she "speaks in all caps" and confronts the gender bias she endured rising in Irish music. "At the moment, it's great that a lot of female artists are coming up in Irish hip-hop. Some aren't at the forefront yet, but they're on the rise," she explains. "When I started, for a long while the only female rappers



were me and Denise [Chaila].” She describes feeling “underestimated in a male-dominated space.” “There wasn’t a sense of community for women and men saw rap as not being our scene. Women are now having our time.” While Celaviedmai recognises an ongoing significant gender disparity, she is hopeful about progress. “Who’s being booked for gigs? Is it equal? Not really. But everything is getting better”.

Celaviedmai is currently maintaining a job alongside a fledgling music career. “Any artist that talks to you and says they make their pay from doing music full time is probably a liar,” she laughs. “We’re all doing that little 9 to 5 for the time-being.” She’s pragmatic, however. “It’s exhausting, but your basic needs have to be met. Unfortunately, making music takes

money and if you want to get to that next level, you have to be in that position. Hopefully, the work pays off”.

Whilst Celaviedmai isn’t ready to quit her day job yet, her art is certainly taking off. With performances this summer at Body & Soul and Forbidden Fruit and plans for a year of releases and collaborations, she is setting her sights high and further afield. “Playing shows outside Ireland is 100% the goal. To be honest, I didn’t believe I’d be playing summer festival slots because when those bookings happened, I hadn’t even dropped the EP. Who knows what’s coming next?”. It seems that the life of Mai is about to get very exciting.

<https://www.instagram.com/celaviedmai>