

In late May 2022, Dhruv Sharma reached a new nadir. Things had been going so well. He dipped out of Yale just two years into his degree, the music career he had been pursuing since he was a teenager in Singapore suddenly catalyzed by the runaway hit “double take,” as Dhruv. But at the start of 2022, he went to California for the first time, hoping to write his debut album with a slew of select songwriters there. Over five months, he participated in maybe eighty sessions, all abject failures. He felt both too guarded and exposed, the slickness of California and the machinery of music overwhelming his once-insular process. He flew to New York without a single song, hoping a visit with an ex-boyfriend might pick him up. He was so nervous he scratched the stains from his hoodie on the way to rendezvous. And that’s where he learned that his partner of two years had already moved on, that any possibility of redemption had vanished. He felt that his personal and professional lives were crumbling, that he’d been dropped into an episode of the worst sitcom ever without a clear exit.

So Dhruv went home to London and sat in his apartment with his little Yamaha keyboard. He brooded over those months in the States and slowly started to sing about them—“feeling like the main character,” he offered, “but in my own tragedy.” The song that emerged, “Tragedy,” became the cornerstone upon which he began to build *Private Blizzard*, an album that explores his season of despair with perfect candor and finds the hooks, the spirit, and the sound to move on. Its title borrowed from “The City Planners,” a Margaret Atwood poem he treasured as a closeted queer teenager in Singapore, *Private Blizzard* confronts self-doubt, loneliness, rejection, and malaise with a dozen shimmering neo-soul anthems and classic ballads that feel like Dhruv’s own cures, extended here to whomever else may need them.

Though Dhruv began writing *Private Blizzard* in London, it truly took shape in a place that still surprises even him: Nashville, Tenn. A friend had told him about JT Daly, a producer there whose unlikely résumé spanned Noah Kahan, Bully, Benson Boone, and k.flay. They might have chemistry? As spring arrived in Nashville in 2023, so did Dhruv. He had written versions of several songs back in London and partially regained his confidence there, as if falling back in love with his real passion. Daly empowered him by demanding he actually doubt himself, to question what exactly his songs should contain. Dhruv thought, for instance, he knew how “Tragedy” would work, but Daly told him to consider removing several sections, to lessen the load on the listener. He was right. By week’s end, “Tragedy”—now a beautiful and seemingly effortless reflection on a very difficult time—was done. Dhruv realized he had found the musical partner he’d sought his entire life, since he was a songwriter sequestered in his Singapore bedroom.

Over the next several months, Dhruv returned repeatedly to Nashville, ultimately cowriting every number on *Private Blizzard* with Daly. Those cursed days from a year prior faded into a memory that also provided artistic fodder. Though it feels like a classic summary of unreciprocated love, its piano hook bouncing off a classic boom-bap beat, “How?” documents Dhruv’s worry that his potential career was losing momentum, that he’d lost some spark by submitting himself to music industry machinations. With strutting bass and psychedelic keyboards, “California” flashes back to those uncertain few months. Dhruv finds strength in real time by realizing he is in the act of overcoming lifetime odds with every new note he sings.

The city itself became an inspiration, too, with a late-night solo stroll down Nashville’s boulevard of bacchanalia, Broadway, prompting the gorgeous “Lonely City Waltz.” Daniel

Tashian—the producer behind one of Dhruv’s favorite albums, Kacey Musgrave’s *The Golden Hour*—wrote and played with Daly and Dhruv. A small but mighty clutch of Nashville aces, like keyboardist Joshua Blaylock and multi-instrumentalist Kelly Pratt, helped the pair build the record’s cozy but urbane soundworld.

What’s most surprising about *Private Blizzard* is how accessible and winning Dhruv is able to make his own hell sound. Opener “Ode to Boredom” is a brief triumph about lying to those around you, about telling them everything is fine while you suffer in secret; it is an anthem for recognizing delusion—and suddenly letting go of it. “Speed of Light” captures the romantic betrayal he experienced through the lover who swore forever only to run away with the quickness; in his hands, though, the story is a lithe funk number, harmonies and vocals swiveling like they’re on the dancefloor. A summary of the lessons we learn when someone disappoints us, “Illusions” is cool and comfortable, Dhruv seeming to smile as he relates this hard but helpful tale of growth. Even the somber songs here—the arching piano ballad “Grieving,” the acoustic confession “The Morning”—sound earned and instructive, Dhruv gliding above the hurt with wisdom.

Most of us have our version of a “private blizzard,” the tumultuous things we conceal in order to function in this world, to get by as best we can. The gift of art is that someone shares theirs, extending it so that we might all feel less alone, crazy, or depressed. That is precisely what Dhruv has done with his *Private Blizzard*. He has shown us the inner workings of one of the lowest periods of his life by singing the very songs that were not only his map of those hardships but his map out of them, too. *Private Blizzard* is, at least, a welcome clearing.