Gus Dapperton has always been obsessed with building new worlds. It’s been part of his passion since he started making songs in Garageband, a creator’s mindset that eventually shaped two independent albums of defiantly original alt-pop. Now signed to Warner Records, Dapperton goes even further on his new project, *Henge*, immersing himself in bold details and immersive songwriting to conjure a twilight world that permanently hovers between sunset and sunrise throughout 11 mercurial songs.

“Manhattanhenge happens in New York when the sun lines up perfectly between the buildings and it looks like a solstice,” the artist-producer says of his cryptic album title. “I came up with the concept about someone entering this underworld as the sun goes down and trying to get home before dawn—or risk being stuck in a time loop.” The push and pull between nighttime revelry and sun-dappled safety resonates with Dapperton in post-pandemic America.

“A lot of my life after COVID is just trying to embrace the world again,” the 26-year-old says. “I was always an introvert, but now I get an adrenaline rush from being around people.” While there is a distinct thematic throughline, Dapperton wants listeners to go on their own journeys.  “I write songs that can be taken out of context and enjoyed individually, but there’s a story you could follow if you wanted to.”

Dapperton's love of sonic world-building has deep roots. The Warwick, New York native didn’t grow up in a traditionally musical family, but there was always something blasting from the radio. As much as he loved music, he didn’t think he would ever make his own: “I tried picking up the guitar,” he remembers. “It didn’t really stick.” An eighth-grade music class changed all that. Students were tasked with making a song in GarageBand—and Dapperton had found his instrument.

Dapperton spent the rest of high school making beats. By the time college came around, his confidence had blossomed. “I started picking up instruments and singing,” he says. While attending Drexel University, he played gigs in Philadelphia and ventured to New York City with just his “computer, an MPD pad, and a guitar.” He soon dropped out and released a series of independent EPs as well as the acclaimed albums *Where Polly People Go to Read* and *Orca*. With buzz brewing, a feel-good feature would be his breakthrough.

“Supalonely,” a collaboration with New Zealand singer-songwriter BENEE, went viral during lockdown in 2020 and amassed more than one billion streams on its way to becoming a double-Platinum hit. “It gave me and other indie artists credibility,” he says. “It showed that alt-pop songs can be massive.” Dapperton signed to Warner Records in 2022 and immediately got started on *Henge*.

From the outset, he knew his approach would be different. Instead of starting with songs, Dapperton plotted out moods and titles and worked backward. “I didn’t follow a super-stern formula,” he says. That’s particularly true of “Sunrise,” the sprawling opening track. Taking inspiration from film scores, the song begins with a strummed guitar before synths erupt and our protagonist enters the Manhattan underworld.

From there, the artist-producer dabbles in ’80s-inspired new wave on the catchy lead single “Horizons” and ’70s funk on “Homebody.” The album’s eclectic sprawl is also reflected in Dapperton’s choice of collaborators, including a reunion with BENEE on “Don’t Let Me Down.”

His team-up with poet Ocean Vuong on “Sunset” took a longer path. “On tour in Korea, a fan gave me a book called *On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous*,” he recounts. Many months later, Dapperton read it and was blown away: “It’s one of the most incredible books I’ve ever read.” He thought they should work together and called on Vuong to write a poem for the album’s final track. “We were immediately on the same page,” he says. “It’s really cool to combine other mediums of art and writing.”

While the scope of *Henge* is vast and ambitious, Dapperton’s music maintains the intimacy that made his previous offerings so resonant. At its core, the album is a way of processing a post-lockdown world. “I think most people can relate to wanting change and chaos, but also monotony and protection,” he says of the album’s tug-of-war between night and day, socializing and solitude. “I’m always internally battling those two sides.”