**MAFRO, bio – August 2023**

**One-line intro:**

Dance music’s next major breakthrough act, MAFRO makes emotional electronic music that swings between extremes of melancholy and euphoria.

**Short:**

MAFRO makes emotional electronic music that swings between melancholy and euphoria, inviting the listener in, and putting them at the centre of the story. The North London artist has flourished as one of the UK's most promising new talents since the launch of his debut EP, Bloom, in 2023. He has been recognised as "dance music's upcoming breakthrough act" in NME's Top 100, and collaborated with the likes of Aluna, TSHA and Diplo on the latter’s recent Grammy-nominated album. Drawing influence from crossover pioneers like SBTRKT, Jai Paul, and Jacques Greene, MAFRO delivers a woozy, free-flowing approach to melody, juxtaposed with impactful lyrics that generate space for tension and release. This is electronic music, but rather than being rooted deep in the club, it’s drifting on its vapours. MAFRO’s singles ‘Love Me’ and ‘Bad Enough’ were released this year ahead of his forthcoming Higher EP, set for release in early 2024.

**Complete:**

Matt Phelan’s story is one of figuring things out, feeling his way through, and finding himself in the process. Since adopting the artist moniker MAFRO, through which he sculpts his own vibrant, melodic take on electronic music, things have started to become a lot clearer and to come full circle.

Since the release of his debut EP, Bloom, the North Londoner has caught the ear of everyone from Pete Tong to Clara Amfo, Jack Saunders, and Danny Howard. He’s been named “dance music’s next major breakthrough act” in the NME Top 100, and contributed production and writing to Grammy-nominated hit, ‘Let You Go’, by US super-producer Diplo.

The *Bloom* EP swung between melancholy and euphoria — introducing a woozy, free-flowing, incidentally catchy approach to melody that is enveloping and memorably engaging.

MAFRO writes empathetic, emotional songs which invite the listener to put themselves in the story. Broad emotional themes abound — dejection leading to renewal, uplift and catharsis — juxtaposing the moods and movements of his music with impactful lyrics that generate space for tension and release. This *is* electronic music, but rather than being rooted deep in the club, it’s drifting on its vapours.

After stints in and out of bands, MAFRO spent most of his 20s as a session musician and backing guitarist, playing behind everyone from Ella Eyre to So Solid Crew. He would go on to create arrangements and plan sets for huge productions as a musical director, before, having put some money aside for a new laptop and studio rental in Tottenham, dipping his toe into music production.

He started out in familiar territory, seeking out singers and alt-R&B acts to collaborate with. He was prepared — or perhaps resigned — to a career behind the boards, bringing others’ ideas to life. It wasn’t until he met Teisha Matthews, the Ninja Tune DJ/producer who goes by TSHA, that his eyes were opened to the possibility of adapting his writing and recording skills to his own artistic career as a multi-instrumentalist. MAFRO offered Matthews time in his studio, he’d help out playing keys every now and then, and kept half an eye on what she was up to. “It might have been a longer process if I hadn't been able to see behind the curtain like that,” he says. It felt like a late epiphany, and an opening for his own creative urges. It gave him a renewed focus, and confidence too. “I couldn’t figure it out for years,” he goes on, “I did a lot of everything else before realising I could do this, basically.”

Joining the dots between his own talents and his love of acts like SBTRKT and Four Tet, who could meld electronic wizardry with an incisive crossover sensibility, he started plotting out his own direction. Others including Jai Paul, Sampha, James Blake, Jacques Greene, and Tourist entered his listening orbit. Things were beginning to make sense. Away from the more functional end of dance music, these artist-producers were tapping into rich emotional seams, and exploring the far reaches of musicality — both of which appealed to MAFRO, and struck him as something he could take on in his own style. “I figured out that there was a slot for what I like and that actually it was something that I could do on my own,” he says. “When you’re working for other people for so long, you lose track of what you actually like.” MAFRO prefers to be hands-on, working with an array of synths, keyboards, drum machines, and, on occasion, his old familiar six-string. This organic approach is key to the enveloping mood of his music. It has to feel real.

He recently debuted a dynamic live show, leaning on his skills as a sought-after musical director to deliver a unique blend of songcraft and studio magic through the lens of the DJ culture which first drew him to electronic music. Tour dates in support of kindred creative spirits SG Lewis and Bonobo have served as a testing ground for a busy summer of festival dates, including appearances at Field Day, Lost Village, and Pitchfork Music Festival Paris.

Now, with the electronic music world becoming increasingly diverse, MAFRO is leaning into his individuality. As the son of a Trinidadian mother and an Irish father, he draws on a diverse range of influences; steel pans, gospel pianos, and even elements of traditional Irish music permeate his musical palette.

“This fusion doesn’t always make sense on paper, but it's exactly this experimentation that excites me the most as a musician,” he says.

His forthcoming Higher EP refines his unique sonic identity as an artist capable of balancing club euphoria with melancholic introspection. Lead single ‘Bad Enough’ (co-written with Connie Constance), is a vivid floor-filler with a hooky vocal lead, driving house beat, and shimmering steel pans. Following that, 'Love Me' seamlessly blends the soulful vocals of featured artist Élde with the catchy 2-step rhythm of UK garage.

MAFRO is a product of everything that came before and delivers something fresh: his ear is newly attuned to pop setups but focused on delivering a more organic sound, layering the R&B vocals he worked with during his early production forays over fresh, melodic electronic sculptures. He’s making music that exists in the sweet spot between the booming club system and home listening on headphones. The difference is that now, for the first time, he’s doing it all for himself.

HIGHER EP is scheduled for release in 2024.