

## Circle The Earth

Michael McBay – Bass  
Khadia – Lead Vocals  
Sandro Feliciano – Drums  
Kazuki Tokaji – Guitars  
Sandy Chao Wang – Keyboards/Keytars

It's impossible to pigeonhole the sound of the upbeat rock band Circle The Earth. With a lineup featuring members from the U.S., Taiwan, Brazil and Japan, all of whom bring extensive professional experience to their music, the Los Angeles-based quintet craft a seamless combination of rock, pop, soul, hip-hop, and even emo, as evidenced on their 2022 independent releases.

Circle The Earth's newest single, the driving pop-rock song “The Sweetest Pain,” illustrates the band members' diverse backgrounds and eclectic approach. Anchored by Khadia's yearning vocals and lightning-bolt rock riffs and solos from guitarist Kazuki Tokaji, the song laments the emotional tumult of a romance that's slowly disintegrating: “I can't walk away, making a fool of me/Living with love I can't explain.” The soul-pop standout “Pick Your Poison,” meanwhile, grapples with trying to navigate life's emotional challenges, atop a foundation of funky grooves, courtesy of founding member and bassist Michael McBay, drummer Sandro Feliciano and keyboardist/music director Sandy Chao Wang.

Musically, both songs were co-written by Tokaji and [Jim McGorman](#). The latter is a multi-instrumentalist and producer who's worked with a variety of rock and pop stars, including Avril Lavigne, Weezer, Gwen Stefani and Goo Goo Dolls, and brings unique musicality to the sessions. “Compared to other songwriters and musicians, he puts melody first,” Tokaji explains. “As a guitarist, I always come up some melodies, but sometimes they don't work for vocalists. But he has a different sense. It's really fun to work with Jim.” Circle The Earth's new songs are produced by [Ethan Kaufman](#), who has worked alongside the likes of Avril Lavigne, Ryan Cabrera and DOROTHY.

Circle The Earth typically works this way, enlisting songwriters to help create a song and then building off this framework by adding their own insights and flourishes. “Typically, after the musical part of the song is done, we'll rehearse and start making it our own,” Khadia says. “Vocally, I'll start doing things that I feel and hear, and may make some changes here and there. The musicians will take it and we'll play around with it, changing the arrangement until we feel it's the best representation of Circle The Earth.”

Khadia takes a similarly personal approach when writing lyrics. “I usually write lyrics based on whatever I'm experiencing in the moment,” she adds. “Whatever I'm going through that has the most impact on my life at that time. My writing feels more organic when I can pull from my current emotions, thoughts and beliefs.”

Circle The Earth coalesced over the course of several years, driven by the vision of McBay. “We want to bring people a message of hope in a world that feels maddening and hateful at times,” he

says. "We're showing that love and truth are real." A self-taught player who's been performing original music in Los Angeles for decades, McBay initially took up bass at age 16, after a group of neighbor musicians introduced him to Jimi Hendrix, Sly & The Family Stone, and other greats. "The first time I heard Yes, I was mesmerized," McBay shares. "I figured the bass was the easiest thing to learn on my own because there's only four strings." Growing up with parents who were academics, McBay himself went to medical school and later practiced emergency medicine before turning to playing in jazz rock and mainstream rock bands.

Roughly a decade ago, McBay met a kindred musical spirit in Brazil-born drummer Sandro Feliciano, who grew up in a musical family. As a teenager, Feliciano started playing percussion with his dad, both at carnival parades or around the house, and then asked for a drum set. "Obviously, my dad said yes, because he's also a musician," Feliciano says with a laugh. "And that's how it started, when I was 13 or so." He quickly picked up gigs in cover bands and played rock and Brazilian music with friends before moving to California to attend the Los Angeles College of Music. That helped him make connections with other L.A. musicians, leading to work with legendary producers like Roy Thomas Baker and Lamont Dozier, and later touring with Teena Marie and Ms. Lauryn Hill.

Khadia was next to join the Circle The Earth fold. The electrifying vocalist had always dreamed of being in a multicultural rock band. In fact, she had even started one after moving from her hometown of Silver Spring, Maryland, to Los Angeles, before deciding to pivot and take on performance gigs with Mya, Janelle Monae and Prince, and be a background singer for Imagine Dragons, *American Idol*, *Jimmy Kimmel Live* and *The American Music Awards*. "I was introduced to Michael and when I heard the music and saw everything that they were doing, it was a direct reflection of what I had been hoping and dreaming of and trying to make a reality for so long," she says. "It was fate."

Khadia initially discovered her talent for music in third grade when her rendition of "Happy Birthday" made a big impression on a teacher, who "called my parents in for a meeting and told them that I had a gift," she says now. Khadia soon joined her elementary school choir and then added on clarinet and piano lessons. "Some people take a long time to find their passion," she notes, "but I was able to find it at a young age."

Several years ago, Tokaji and keyboardist Wang joined Circle The Earth. Growing up in Taiwan, Wang was the only one in her family interested in music, as she took group piano lessons and played in the school orchestra. Her love of music intensified after she moved to the U.S. and joined her school's concert and marching bands. Although her first preference was to play the trumpet, she eventually found her niche in piano and studied the instrument in college.

Tokaji also found his musical path early on and was the only musician in his family. ("Everybody else does some kind of sport," he says.) However, he decided playing guitar was his destiny at age 7. "I told my mom, 'I don't need a birthday gift.' Instead, I want to take guitar lessons," he shares. "And she let me." Tokaji gravitated toward hard rock and metal, and later moved to Los Angeles to continue honing his skills, and has since performed with musicians such as Marty Friedman, Chuck Wright and Derek Sherinian.

McBay couldn't be happier with how Circle The Earth's lineup came together. "The coolest thing about these musicians is that not only are they talented and have good ideas, but they project energy and enthusiasm," he says. "They translate the music electrically."

Unsurprisingly, Khadia views Circle The Earth's live performances as one of their strengths. "That's where we sound the most organic and feel most natural and connected." Feliciano agrees with this assessment, adding: "Our music translates really well in front of an audience. We can embrace it, turn it into our own, and connect with people."

As Circle The Earth gear up to release more music and start playing more live shows, the band members are striving to produce music that leaves good vibes in its wake—and makes the world a better place. "We try to keep our music as positive and uplifting as possible, with a message of unity and inclusion, and emphasizing the beauty of diversity," McBay leaves off. "All of us are very spiritually oriented people. And we all have the same positive heart, and we're translating that into our music."

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