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Entertainment

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GODDESS COMPLEX

R&B singer Banks on her journey
from diva to deity. By ELIO IANNACCI

THERE ARE TWO RECURRING THEMES THAT ARE HARD TO miss on Jillian Banks's debut disc, *Goddess*. Songs such as "This Is What It Feels Like" and "Brain" make it immediately apparent that the L.A.-based singer-songwriter has a knack for translating issues of self-worth and self-indulgence into verse. In "Drowning," she uses her vocals—swathed in The Weeknd-esque electro-soul—to deliver a »

few truthful blows to a lover she's thrown out the door. "I'm the one who had to learn to build a heart made of armour," she sings. "From the girl who made you soup and tied your shoes when you were hurting / You are not deserving, you are not deserving!"

There is a reason why respect is top of mind for Banks (who uses her last name as her stage name). When she first started writing *Goddess*, she was at a crossroads. "I was going through so much and in a very dark place," she says. "I'm a very passionate human, and when I'm feeling something, I can't even put it into words. Only melodies

can explain things properly."

For motivation, Banks turned to a few musical idols for guidance. "Early on, I was listening to a lot of Fiona Apple, and it was really inspiring to see someone so fearless. She does not hold anything back," Banks says. "[She] inspired me to do that too."

One thing Banks insists on during the recording process is that her songs never come from a place of fiction. "I have to live through something to write it, and I need to bring that to the performance when it is time to sing. It can't be someone else's story. It has to be mine."

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It is because of this candour that Banks's lyrics often sound like dialogue she's had in past relationships. In a song called "Before I Ever Met You," she spells out more dysfunction in her lyrics, crooning: "You bring out the mean in me / I bring out your insecurities."

Her plan to stray from penning shameless party anthems or lascivious hits stocked with hit-you-over-the-head references was purely intentional as well.

"The songs that I've released are not based on sex whatsoever. Forcing myself to talk about sex is never something I'm going to do," she says. "You should never feel like you have to include sex in a song in order for it to be popular—that's eliminating so many amazing, beautiful emotions in your work." Instead of what goes on between the sheets, Banks is much more interested in what is going on between the pages of a book on mythology called *Mermaids: The Myths, Legends, and Lore* that she is currently absorbed by. Written by astrologist, author and drummer Skye Alexander (who also wrote a book called *The Secret Power of Spirit Animals*), it speaks to the many powerful incarnations and real-life sightings of the legendary aquatic creature.

"Myths are a big theme in my work. I want women to feel like goddesses," Banks says, without sounding at all like an Oprah Winfrey "aha" moment. "It's my mission." □



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