



PHOTOGRAPHY: MARIANO VIVANCO; FASHION DIRECTOR: NICOLA FORMICCHETTI; HAIR: BOB; MAKEUP: BILLY B

# CHART BREAKING STYLE

**WHEN IT COMES TO POP MUSIC**, your paycheck is only as big as your persona. Take, for example, the barrage of hit-making female singers currently dominating the charts—Lady Gaga, Rihanna and Katy Perry—all of whom have crafted larger-than-life identities by adopting a theatrical approach to dressing. Mixing their music with some of the most off-the-chart ensembles, these sisters are *overdoing* it for themselves. So what is the impact of pop's extreme fashion fixations? Head-to-toe looks chosen for videos, CD sleeves and red carpet events that explode online in blogs, Flickr uploads and Retweets.

Fashion makes headlines. It's become par for the course that when a major music video debuts, with it comes a list of participating designers as well as news sites and TV channels reporting on what the popster is wearing. Although some may counter that much hasn't changed from The Beatles to Bieber (pop star haircuts still elicit screams), the truth is, the concept of the triple threat has altered—particularly for female vocalists. In other words, hitting the charts requires looking the part, and the "full package" in pop no longer equals the singer-songwriter-producer equation. Our new stars (save for talents such as Adele—so far) are getting pushed into quadruple threat territory, a place where the title of style icon must be added to their already-cluttered CV.

## The PG (Pre-Gaga) Era

Having worked on branding Madonna's body of work for more than 10 years, prominent stylist Arianne Phillips's knowledge of the powerful relationship between music and fashion is formidable to say the least. One of the first major projects she worked on with her iconic client was reshaping Madonna's image for her comeback disc of 1998, *Ray of Light*. "Madonna was going through a personal renaissance," Phillips says. "She had a newborn baby—Lourdes—and the record is about spirituality and transformation. I met Olivier Theyskens and [introduced her] to his pre-Raphaelite dresses during her European promo tour. For the video to 'Frozen' she wears [Jean Paul] Gaultier and looks like a bird—the concept had her as a black, goth angel." The track went on to become the first Madonna song to debut at number 1. However, after style-directing

## A NEW GENERATION of singers & stylists are using FASHION to amplify their MUSICAL MESSAGE By Elio Iannacci

subsequent videos during *Ray of Light's* shelf life (from the shrunken jean jacket in the title track to items worn throughout from Stella McCartney's early collections), Phillips was shocked to see how fashion began to pull away from the music scene altogether. "There was a lull for a while in terms of what was happening musically with the Britney Spears and the Christina Aguilera—the kind of stars from the mid-2000s," Phillips says of the slew of homogenous, faux-sexy looks that ran rampant in pop at the time. Everything had gotten so expected—"tastefully not tasteful," she laughs.

So Phillips—who is currently working with Gwen Stefani on a clothing line for children—says she was relieved when Gaga put an end to the sartorial predictability associated with early millennial pop. "Thank God this new generation of artists like Lady Gaga, Rihanna and Katy Perry are having fun with fashion in the same outrageous and experimental ways that Madonna, Cyndi Lauper and Boy George did in the '80s. Or Cher and Elton John did in the '70s."

## Lady Gaga: Adorned This Way

When asked how the runway can help propel a pop career, Phillips brings up the woman many consider to be a Madonna protege. "Gaga is using fashion to make a statement and entertain," Phillips says enthusiastically about pieces Gaga has worn (namely the latex egg outfit by Thierry Mugler, the politically-charged 2010 MTV Video Music Awards meat dress and a number of labels in the "Born This Way" video). "It's exciting to see a young person like >





**●● NOW SHE'S NOT ONLY IN THE MUSIC PRESS. SHE'S CONSTANTLY ON THE COVER OF FASHION MAGAZINES ●●**

Rihanna: Good Girl Gone Glam

As Formichetti is to Gaga, Simon Henwood is to Rihanna. The prolific British visual artist, whose significant other is pop star aesthete and fashion designer favourite Róisín Murphy, is also credited with helping build Kanye West's stylish empire. (Henwood has consulted on West's soon-to-be-announced fashion collection and was in charge of conceptualizing Kanye's Glow In The Dark tour.)

"I came on as creative director with [Rihanna] for about 18 months and everything from that developed into a high fashion approach... which gave her more

confidence. We went to Paris and I took her to a lot of the fashion shows and introduced her to Karl Lagerfeld and Alexandre Vauthier. [The latter] became one of her principal designers," says Henwood.

The result? Packing up closets filled with maxi dresses and spring break-inspired beach wear, the now 23-year-old went through a drastic persona change. Her move away from sporting island gal threads to European couture strategically coincided with a shift in her music and private life. Retiring the bubble gum pop antics of her previous recordings, Rihanna approached a darker, much more adult lyrical terrain on *Rated R* and hired Henwood to help pilot her S&M-informed image post-"Umbrella"/Chris Brown. Henwood, who is in the midst of planning a two-man exhibit of his own work in collaboration with Francis Bacon's estate, was also hired to creative direct Rihanna's Last Girl on Earth tour. Recalling how important Rihanna's clothes were for the tour (many key pieces are from Vauthier) and her dramatic return to the spotlight in 2009, the London-based talent says he regards *Rated R* "as a fresh blueprint" for the Barbadian. "She wanted to make a statement about coming back because she'd had all these personal issues in her life."

Aside from allowing her to fit into Vauthier's (and Gaultier's) sharp shoulder pads, Henwood says Rihanna's *Rated R* couture education soon opened her up to a greater media reach. "It helped her profile... Now she's not only in the music press, she's constantly on the cover of fashion magazines. One of the first things we did with *Rated R* was a 16-page photo spread for Italian *Vogue*—which she would not have been anywhere near a year or two before," he says. The result of such a strong fashion connection was landing the cover of April's *Vogue* and, like so many other singers, the contemplation of a namesake collection. "I know that Rihanna has aspirations to work in fashion," Henwood says, hinting at the prospect of his pop star client making a catwalk crossover.

Katy Perry: Teenage Seams

If there is anyone out there in pop land who has benefited from fashion's magic wand, it's California gurl Katy Perry. After releasing a Christian rock album under her real >

her take those fashion historical influences from people such as Leigh Bowery and Grace Jones and translate them and make them her own. She's groundbreaking. She's following a great tradition but fearlessly inspiring a new generation. She's upped the ante," says Phillips.

Whether it's by a director, paparazzo or a fan with a hand-held device, 25-year-old Stefani Germanotta's work attire screams out to be immortalized in film. "Fashion saved my life," she confessed to *FLARE* in December 2009—a time when her number 1 single "Bad Romance" was climbing atop Billboard. The Italian-American star has since tapped a plethora of designers (old and young, vintage and underground, self-made and labelled) to amplify her monster message of self-expression.

Another long-time admirer of Gaga's aesthetic is Alistair Newton, the director and playwright behind a soon-to-be-staged theatrical production called *Of a Monstrous Child: a gaga musical*. Calling Gaga's connection to fashion "a symbiotic relationship" due to her collaborations with the late Alexander McQueen and Mugler's creative director, Nicola Formichetti, Newton says he sees fashion designers gaining something from collaborating with the disco-stick-waving singer.

"[They get] to expose their clothes to a wider audience and she, by association, gets to have avant garde, experimental street cred," he says. Whatever the trade-off is, it's working. So much so that the Council of Fashion Designers of America recently awarded Gaga with their coveted Fashion Icon of the Year award.

PHOTOGRAPHY: CORBIS (RED HAIR); GETTY IMAGES (BLACK HAIR)





can be as energizing to a star as a vitamin B shot. In Perry's instance, it can even be the impetus for a music video's focal point. "That big white finale dress in Katy's 'E.T.' video by Viktor & Rolf? It became one of the main references we brought to the director," says Wujek. (That director also happens to be former *FLARE* fashion photographer Flavia Sigismondi.)

### More Tongue Than Chic

Yet for every piece of good press inspired by the right fashion move (think Florence Welch's or Nicki Minaj's epic Givenchy-clad Grammy red carpet moments), there are dozens of misdirections of the couture kind.

Take Christina Aguilera, whose career of late has been lambasted because of her choice of dress more so than any of the missteps made on all six of her major discs combined. Case in point? The video for her should-have-been-a-comeback-hit song "Not Myself Tonight"—which casts Aguilera in a series of awkwardly-styled PVC outfits—symbolically has the diva setting a rolling rack on fire (her

**• OLD KATY STARTED OFF AS THIS PIN-UP LOLITA—THE HIGH-WAISTED SHORTS AND VINTAGE HEART SUNGLASSES KIND OF GIRL ♪**

name—Katy Hudson—two days before her 17th birthday, the now-26-year-old pop star renovated her entire career with the help of her stylist Johnny Wujek. Keeping the kook and quirk factors alive and kicking in her wardrobe, Wujek collaborated with Perry on making her mode mirror her music throughout her chart climb with songs such as "I Kissed a Girl" and "Hot N Cold."

"We divide her looks into categories now: old and new Katy," Wujek says of his client's style progression. "Old Katy started off as this pin-up Lolita—the high-waisted shorts and vintage heart sunglasses kind of girl," he says of Perry's previous Disney-fied Dita Von Teese look. "The new Katy is pushing boundaries with technology," Wujek explains. Citing her number-one hit on the red carpet—the *Tron*-like LED light dress she wore at last year's Met Costume Institute Gala—Wujek says he was floored by the media coverage. The dress, designed by CuteCircuit, landed Perry on the cover of *WWD*, in *People* magazine and in a lead story on the *Today* show.

Wujek says that when he styles Perry, each outfit she wears must match the "theme and the message" behind her performance. He also notes that choosing the right outfit

connection to taste?). Her looks, more so than any of her hooks, have been deemed Gaga knock-offs and fan forums have since passionately debated Aguilera's authenticity as a performer. Add a series of poorly played red carpet moments and the fact that her planned world tour was cancelled, and you have no one else to blame but her image consultants. (To be fair, the rest of her *Bionic* album does have a few high points, including a catchy duet with Nicki Minaj that never even made it to radio.)

Aguilera's current fashion crisis is a crucial lesson: Makeup, hair and clothing have now become defining factors in popular culture's ever-expanding vocabulary. Which is why stylists are getting recognized as the architects behind the icons and not just the hired help. Stars, on the other hand, are also getting wiser to fashion's power, which is why so many of them, including Jay-Z, Kanye West and even classic artists such as Jody Watley, are actually curating their own style blogs to keep their fingers on the pulse of Paris, Milan and New York.

As for what the future holds for the next super diva to step up to the proverbial mike? One can only surmise that if history is ready to repeat itself and swing back to the anti-glamour girl, Lilith Fair may just have a chance to get its Birkenstocks back in business, or another parade of Norah Jones clones in floral summer dresses and unkempt dos will once again rule the iTunes roost. Until then, a quote from a lost Gaga B-side called "Fashion" pretty much sums up glamour's current grip on the charts: "You are who you wear it's true/A girl's just as hot as the shoes she choose." □