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FURTADO**

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JULY 2010
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Canadian All-Star

Passionate and patriotic, Nelly Furtado is Canada's number one fan. *By Elio Iannacci*
Photography by Max Abadian

In the pantheon of pop divas, Nelly Furtado remains a fierce anomaly. Unlike many of her contemporaries, the Victoria, B.C.-born singer-songwriter has yet to choose a defining music genre that she can call her own. Instead, she is content with combining various sounds in hopes of creating her own brand of pop couture. What's also rare about Furtado is that she never sticks to a premade script of strategically placed quotes when she gives an interview—she's as present and spontaneous in person as she is on stage. The only consistent thing about the 31-year-old star is that her energy level spikes every time she comes in contact with her living, breathing version of a Vitamin B shot—her fans. That said, keeping up with Furtado in conversation isn't always easy because: a) the Juno-/Grammy-winning artist is one fast talker; and b) she always has a lot going on around her.

"I think I'm a person who needs to be constantly entertained. I have my own form of attention deficit disorder," she says via phone from Puerto Rico, hours before stepping onto the red carpet for the Billboard Latin Music Awards. "I'm always needing new information," she insists. "I like keeping my brain occupied at all times." That's her explanation for two dissimilar tracks she's featured on, which are currently burning up the clubs and the blogs—a hip hop number by N.E.R.D. called "Hot & Fun," and a trance song by Dutch DJ, Tiësto called "Who Wants to Be Alone."

It's no wonder her eclectic taste in music reflects her just-as-eclectic roots. As a proud Portuguese-Canadian, Furtado divides her time between homes in Victoria, Portugal, Toronto and Miami. She is literally all over the place—mind, spirit and body.

Top of mind right now is her hotly anticipated next album. Containing her first batch of new songs recorded in English since 2006's smash hit *Loose*, her forthcoming disc is something she insisted on taking her time with. Tentatively titled *Lifestyle* and slated for release this fall, the disc is something bloggers, critics and fans alike are seeing as a project that is long overdue. However, Furtado won't be rushed ("I've got to feel it 100 percent before I release it," she says). While most artists in her league would have been manic to get back into the studio after watching hits such as "Promiscuous," "Say It Right" and "All Good Things" climb to the top of the global charts, Furtado followed her artistic instinct instead and recorded a Spanish disc in 2009 called *Mi Plan*.

"I've never really had that commerce chip in my brain," she explains. "I don't understand when somebody says, 'Hey, this is good for the market so you should do it.' What does that mean exactly? I feel like my market is in my heart."

Furtado's heart has always been intrinsically connected to the underground. As one of the first mainstream pop singers to collaborate with Missy Elliott (before Janet Jackson and >



Dress, BCBGMaxAzria Runway. Earrings, Ranjana Khan, Holt Renfrew; bracelet, Burberry.



Jacket, Lou de Beauregard, TNT. Tank top, T Alexander Wang, Holt Renfrew. Jean, Genetic Denim, Holt Renfrew. Bracelet, Chanel; earrings, Dannijo; necklace, Cathy B Jewelry. For where-to-buy, see *StyleSource*. Hair and makeup, Colleen Creighton, Kramer+Kramer; prop stylist, Matt Jackson; fashion director, Elizabeth Cabral.

every other A-lister worked with the rapper), producer Timbaland (prior to his gig with Madonna) and highly influential dance DJ Paul Oakenfold (previous to his Björk and Britney Spears remixes), Furtado's foresight helped her gain an international following. "My breakthrough happened when I sang 'Get Ur Freak On' with Missy," she says. "Doors opened after that."

However, when she looks at all the emerging pop queens coming out of the woodwork, Furtado doesn't see competition, she sees inspiration. "Lady Gaga is keeping pop music alive," she says in admiration. "She's raised the bar so much—including how much thought you put into the presentation of music and how interesting a video can be. That's what keeps the gears going in the music business. Could you imagine what it would be like without her now?"

Furtado also connects to Gaga's sense of experimentation—something she says is extremely important. "Recently I have been doing my own photo shoots, where I arrange my own in-house art direction so I can explore my vision.... I've always wanted to extend my boundaries and I've never been one who likes doing things because they are trendy," she says, reflecting on her past four studio albums.

"Music is a great equalizer for me. It's my secret lock and key into the world. I always find that no matter what happens in life, I've always got this little secret code. People are interested in emotion more than ever. When [musicians] can paint a picture and give us a lyric that opens up a new emotional world, we crave that as humans—and that will never go away. That's why everyone is so magnetically drawn towards Taylor Swift—she can write a good lyric. I think my fans are also craving messages right now."

The statements she wants to make with her new material are, in true Furtado fashion, a mixed bag. One of the song contenders lined up for *Lifestyle* called "Girlfriend In This City" (which recently leaked onto the Internet), sounds like it could be the prequel to Sandra Bullock's highly

Canada has so much talent that it blows my mind—that's why I live here

publicized split. The song's telenovela-inspired lyrics dole out lines such as "I'm dying to know what she's like/ Although I know it won't make this right/You've got a girlfriend in this city/And it's not me" against dramatic strings which mirror the guilt and jealousy related to suspecting your mate is cheating on you.

"I have a song that is inspired by the Tiger Woods saga, too," Furtado reveals. "It's called 'The Edge' and it's about being pushed too far in a relationship. It's when you've taken a lot, you've given a lot, you've loved a lot and you've forgiven a lot, but then you reach a point where you don't want to be patient, friendly or maintain your cool anymore."

Another recently leaked track called "Free" (a dance-club anthem) is a throwback to Furtado's early days. "I feel like I've come full circle with it. I started off in the dance scene when I was an independent artist, so recording it was natural for me," she says, adding that she's also recorded additional songs with Tiësto. "I believe dance music can be emotional. If you watch [Tiësto] play live, tears will come to your eyes because the music moves you." To offset all the bass-heavy fist pumpers, Furtado has also recorded what she calls "a pretty song" with the lead singer of "it" band Passion Pit, and reportedly more than 20 hip hop tracks with former collaborator Timbaland. This is on top of making time to be a part of the upcoming movie *Score: A Hockey Musical*, which stars fellow singer Olivia Newton-John. "I play a hardcore hockey fan named Colette who follows an Ontario league—I'm a full-on fan of my team from Brampton," Furtado laughs. "Wait until you see what I'm wearing!"

In addition to her newfound role on screen, Furtado has a few ongoing roles in real life. She's a wife (her husband, Demacio Castellon, is the sound engineer who worked on her platinum-selling album, *Loose*) and the mother of a six-year-old girl, Nevis. "She's full of life and has a very strong will," Furtado proudly says of her daughter. "She's got cool musical tastes too—the other day she corrected me and said, 'I knew about MGMT before you!'" Furtado is equally excited to talk about the musical talents coming out of Canada's indie and electro world—bands such as Metric and Crystal Castles. Which makes sense since Furtado has recently launched her own record label named Nelstar, and is looking for new acts to sign.

"I think Canada's track record is pretty awesome right now and it's only going to get better. We *so* need a cool, big music festival here—I think people would come from all over the world to see the Canadian goods," she says. "Canada has so much talent that it blows my mind—that's why I live here."

Aside from the music, Furtado has a keen interest in homegrown style. "I really like [Canadian designers] Greta Constantine's new collection," she says. "What they do is so cool and world class. I'm wearing this copper faux-leather dress with cut outs in it for the Latin Billboard Awards." Then, without missing a beat, Furtado offers a theory on why our country's designers and artists are excelling at such a rapid pace.

"There is an openness to exploration in Canada—we have a non-partisan feel to our approach to life. That really helps because once you're open, the sky's the limit." □