



Lana Mania

Inside the world of Lana Del Rey,
pop music's queen of sadcore.

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"SOME DAYS I LIVE BY THE SAYING, 'IT'S BETTER TO ASK forgiveness than beg permission,'" says Lana Del Rey, gripping her seatbelt firmly as we drive through a rocky path near Malibu's Zuma Beach. It's high noon on a sultry January day in California, and the sun-swathed spot we are heading toward—which Del Rey has hand-picked for *FASHION*'s cover shoot—looks like a desert island. While she watches two surfers head out into the rolling waves, the singer-songwriter is too distracted by the view to acknowledge a sign that reads "Enter At Your Own Risk, Idiots" (the insult is in spray paint). Despite the crew's budding concerns, Del Rey doesn't bat one of her Vegas-ready eyelashes at the warning. Instead, she gently pets her Veronica Lake-ish mane—freshly freed from the tyranny of hot rollers, pinned at 5 a.m.—and assures everyone that the experience will be well worth the discomfort.

"It's the worry warts in the world that keep all the ships from sinking, and I do love them all," the 27-year-old says as the van stops beside a creamy bank of sand. "But once in a while you've got to rock the boat and think about getting off of everyone else's map," she adds. "Nothing makes me feel more alive."

Del Rey's sentiments sound like lyrics pulled from her *Billboard*-topping album, *Born To Die*, or its follow-up EP, *Paradise*. Released last year, both discs are the main reason why Del Rey—dubbed by critics as the queen of sadcore pop—was one of the most Googled women of 2012, racking up more than 722 million searches online (beating out Rihanna, Lady Gaga and Michelle Obama).

Her seductive, sombre voice is not the only cause of Del Rey mania. Hundreds of blazing comment boards have argued over the originality behind her retro Americana style, debated her biographical authenticity and disputed her hype. According to most sources, the abridged LDR bio reads as follows: She grew up in Lake Placid, N.Y., and was part of a church choir as a child. Bored and exasperated with small-town life, she became

addicted to alcohol in her early teens. Not knowing what to do, her parents sent her to a Connecticut boarding school at 14, hoping their daughter would straighten out. She didn't. She ended up checking into a Brooklyn rehab facility, cleaned up, went on to finish high school, got into Fordham University and studied metaphysics until she dropped out to find herself. Soon she began making music under her real name, Elizabeth "Lizzy" Grant (Del Rey's stage moniker was inspired by Lana Turner and her affinity for Spanish-sounding seaside towns). After she moved to a New Jersey trailer park, two indie labels helped her release songs, including a stark, melancholy number called "Video Games," for which Del Rey made a video that spliced archival footage from classic cartoons and films into a camcorder reel of her singing. It quickly garnered more than 20 million YouTube views and had Lady Gaga and Madonna's record company, Interscope, running to her trailer with offers, contracts and promises.

While this all makes for an unquestionably interesting trajectory, it is Del Rey's song lyrics about what she calls her "wilderness years" that have incited her allure. On *Born To Die*'s title track, she uses her three-octave range to urge listeners to "come and take a walk on the wild side," and on *Paradise*'s first single, "Ride," she doles out verses about "dying young and then playing hard." As badass as this all sounds, Del Rey's tracks are not a primer on how to be a thrill junkie. Instead, they tackle what she considers one of life's greatest dangers: love.

Such is the case with her latest offering, a song from the star-studded soundtrack to *The Great Gatsby*. Beyoncé and Florence + The Machine also appear on the disc—each doing their best to mirror the roaring schmaltz of Baz Luhrmann's amphetamine-spiked Jazz Age film. However, it is Del Rey's cut, "Young and Beautiful," that stands out as the aural wild card. Its epically lush chorus contains two repeated pleas »

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directed at lovers and, perhaps, listeners: “Will you still love me when I’m no longer young and beautiful? / Will you still love me when I’ve got nothing but my aching soul?” The dark, symphonic ballad already has a number of movie and music insiders betting that Del Rey will be nominated in the best song category at next year’s Academy Awards.

When the prospect of singing at the 2014 Oscars is brought up after she finishes her last pose of the day, Del Rey responds with what can only be described as wounded gratitude.

“Feeling like you’re respected among the people who do the same thing you do is incredible and necessary,” she says. “I don’t believe in the school of hard knocks, although I’ve had them. All that stuff about whatever doesn’t kill you makes you stronger is so not true. Do you know what makes you stronger? When people treat you and your art with dignity.”

When asked if she is currently feeling supported—considering her trophy case contains a coveted Ivor Novello songwriting honour and a 2013 Brit Award for best international female solo artist—she answers warmly.

“If you are born an artist, you have no choice but to fight to stay an artist. I feel like my work’s important, but I don’t always feel like I get respect for it,” she says, likely referring to the backlash she received over her widely panned performance on *Saturday Night Live* last year. The now-infamous gig, which had critics and Twitter bullies ream her for being shaky and nervous, was not half as appalling as the auto-tuned (Kanye West), off-key (Coldplay) and lip-synching (Ashlee Simpson) acts previously booked on the show, but during the fallout, Del Rey postponed her world tour.

“When I feel like people don’t like [my] music and that the 10 years I spent making what I made was not for a good reason, that makes me want to drink again,” she says, proudly pointing out that her muses have kept her sober for 10 years.

Images of a few of Del Rey’s saviours are strategically placed around the ’60s-style boathouse she calls her L.A. HQ. A portrait of Elvis in a gold jumpsuit hangs above her bed, a photo of Marilyn Monroe graces her bathroom and various crosses are sporadically strewn through the space. Diehard Del Rey fans know that this collection of icons connects to one of the singer’s most personal songs, “Body Electric,” in which she sings: “Elvis is my daddy / Marilyn’s my mother / Jesus is my bestest friend.”

Another group of Del Rey supporters came from an unlikely place: the fashion industry. Spellbound by her commitment to ’50s and ’60s glamour in videos such as “Summertime Sadness” and “National Anthem” (the latter casts Del Rey as Jackie Kennedy in a modern-day version of JFK’s Camelot), a number of brands have flocked to her side. Del Rey’s style-centric fan base includes Mulberry—which designed a “Del Rey” name-

sake bag—as well as designers such as Christopher Kane (who opened his Spring 2012 show by playing “Video Games”) and Donatella Versace. Noting her growing fashion following, Next Model Management shrewdly signed Del Rey to its roster before H&M named her the face of its 2012 fall campaign.

“People in fashion rescued me,” Del Rey says. “Because they are so much more removed from the music arena, they felt it was OK to support me when I needed it most. They never had any baggage about who I was. I think I’ve learned something from them as well: I know now that it’s really important to feel beautiful. There is a power to that.”

Del Rey’s own sense of style takes its cues as much from classic Hollywood pinups as it does from characters in David Lynch’s work, including heroines such as Audrey Horne (*Twin Peaks*), Lula Fortune (*Wild at Heart*) and Dorothy Vallens (*Blue Velvet*). She’s currently working on translating this glam noir look for the video for her next recording, “Black Beauty” (rumoured for release in August), as well as upcoming concert dates. She describes her stage as very Lynch-y, blending “rock ’n’ roll, glamour and gargoyles.” Her opening act will be Cassidy, a Scottish alt-folk band whose lead singer is Barrie-James O’Neill, a musician Del Rey has been dating for more than a year.

A handful of songs from the concert will be taken from *Paradise*, which was partially written in Los Angeles. “L.A. is truly the land of gods and monsters,” she says, referring to a song title on the EP. “I met so many ridiculous and fascinating characters when I lived in the Chateau [Marmont Hotel],” she hints. One person Del Rey chatted up during her stay at the Chateau was actress Lindsay Lohan, who was banned from the establishment. “She’s really interesting, and she’s a fan of mine and she knows that I love her too,” says Del Rey in a protective tone. “Anyone who has enough online traction and gains a lot of opinions about them can empathize with her. We are in a similar boat.”

Like Lohan, Del Rey has experienced being chased and dissected by tabloid culture. To ward off the TMZ vampires, Del Rey keeps her literary heroes around her as if they are cloves of garlic. A tattoo on her right arm reads “Nabokov Whitman,” in honour of Vladimir Nabokov, the Russian writer who penned *Lolita*, and American poet Walt Whitman, who wrote Del Rey’s favourite ode, “I Sing the Body Electric,” in *Leaves of Grass*.

“I’m down with the digital age, but the world needs poetry now more than ever,” she says. “It’s the only thing that can keep music from copying itself. Look what it did to me. I still remember the first time I read [Allen Ginsberg’s poem] “Howl,” [and] I realized that poets could paint pictures through words. I knew then that I wanted to do the same thing. I wanted to make someone feel electric through words. That, to me, is truly wild.” □





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