

EDITOR:  
ELIO IANNACCI

## next

## NEW DIVA ON THE BLOCK

FIRST THERE WAS WHITNEY. THEN, MARIAH. NOW, MEET POP'S LATEST CHART-TOPPER, LEONA LEWIS

**A**lthough Leona Lewis has been compared to almost every major pop-soul singer around today, she is far from becoming a Whitney Houston wannabe. She has no aspirations to take over Caesars Palace like Celine Dion and she's certainly not aiming to be Mariah Carey version 2.0 any time soon.

Yet the U.K.-based 23-year-old does have enough vocal power to stand onstage—and belt it out—with all three of them. Ever since her champion hit single “Bleeding Love” struck MySpace, YouTube, iTunes and radio like a meteor—months after she won Britain's music-talent show *The X Factor*—her No. 1 on 30-charts song was so strong it ended up outlasting every Timbaland-produced track on the market. Lewis even managed to do the unheard of: steal the sweets off of Madonna's new baby, *Hard Candy*, and unknowingly go head-to-head with Mariah Carey's own hard-hitting *E=MC<sup>2</sup>* tracks. While Madge's “4 Minutes” lasted a few measly weeks

diva past, present and future. In songs such as “I'm You,” you'll hear verses that subtly build up the nuances of her voice. In *Spirit's* most dramatic ballad, “Here I Am,” you'll find no sign of Christina Aguilera-type histrionics either, even when Lewis decides to throw in a couple of triple salchow high notes in the song's climax. Her gift for keeping herself restrained yet resilient? “It comes from all my early classical training.

“I started singing operas when I was nine, everything from Handel to Verdi. When I got into contemporary music, I got an education on what actually happens in the studio—all the technical sides of [singing]. I learned that a voice is an instrument for expression.”

Lewis also learned that support is key when it comes to life in the music biz. Besides her family, with whom she still lives in Hackney—a borough of London—she cites her boyfriend, an electrical-maintenance student named Lou Al-Chamaa, as her rock. Having known Al-Chamaa since she was an adolescent, Lewis says she couldn't live through the stress of *The X Factor* (“It felt like audition after audition”) without him: “Figuring out what you really want to do with your life, and what makes you happy in life, is hard.” No doubt it's

riding high on *The Billboard Hot 100* and Carey is still struggling to keep her own peak, Lewis's “Bleeding Love” hasn't moved from its steady top-10 position since it came to town in April. Not bad for someone who was born the same year *Like a Virgin* took over MTV.

However, unlike many younger hit-makers, Lewis is not wrapped up in Mimi or the Material Girl at all. “I'm interested in classic R&B,” she says via phone from Los Angeles. “I love to listen to [late soul singer] Minnie Riperton on my iPod—she's an inspiration. Her hits ‘Inside My Love’ and ‘Lovin’ You’ are favourites of mine.”

Lewis's debut disc, *Spirit*, is a testament to her old-school taste. With uplifting tracks such as “Whatever It Takes,” Lewis's delivery is a combination—not a carbon copy—of the soul and pop of

easier with someone else to lean on. Lewis also has the support of major players, including her famous producers, *American Idol's* Simon Cowell and Whitney Houston's mentor, Clive Davis. Following suit, Sean “Diddy” Combs recently told *The Daily Mirror* he is a “huge fan” of her work and hopes to duet with Lewis on his next album.

But dodging Diddy isn't the only thing Lewis is busy with. Having just performed for Nelson Mandela's 90th birthday party, Lewis's next offstage project is designing a new vegan line of clothing (she's been a vegetarian since she was 12), undoubtedly motivated by her favourite label, Stella McCartney. “I love her clothes—she's eco-minded and ethical,” says Lewis. “I think she inspires so many people. I only hope to do the same.” —E.I.