

World Gone Gaga

FASHION SAVED
LADY GAGA'S LIFE
AND GAVE HER
CONFIDENCE.
ELIO IANNACCI
FINDS OUT HOW
SHE INTENDS
TO RETURN
THE FAVOUR
PHOTOGRAPHY
BY MAX ABADIAN



She's made us think outside the conventions of the red carpet and the runway in ways we never thought possible.

She's turned our best- and worst-dressed lists upside down and inside out. She's made the absurd look elegant and the elegant look absurd. In a sea of fashion-oblivious pop starlets who wear predictable, stylist-prescribed outfits, Lady Gaga is changing the world one sequin at a time.

In fact, this is the 23-year-old singer's mission statement—one she repeats in almost every interview. And whether you're an F.O.G. (Fan of Gaga) or completely Gagaphobic, you have to admit, she's completing her task mightily. Just keeping track of the amount of blogs, vlogs and tweets debating on whether she is a couture original or a fleeting faux pas is, in and of itself, a full-time job. Yet, behind the web-induced fashion frenzy that is El Gaga, lays a spirited trajectory fit for a Hollywood biopic. Formerly known as Stefani Joanne Angelina Germanotta, the New York-native has become the third artist in history to have three No. 1 singles from a debut album on the *Billboard* chart. Her first disc, suitably titled *The Fame*, has made her a fortune, selling four million copies worldwide and reaching triple-platinum status in Canada. The monster success of her debut—which spurred three American Music Award nominations—even prompted Gaga to head back into the studio to record eight more tracks for its re-release, a two-disc affair re-titled *The Fame Monster*.

This new project, which hits iTunes and stores on Nov. 23, precedes Lady Gaga's North American tour—a clutch of concert dates she originally planned to headline alongside rapper Kanye West. Wisely parting with West after his scandalous Swift outburst at the MTV Video Music Awards, Gaga announced she was hitting the road alone. Eager to talk about her first arena tour, via phone from New York City, Gaga deems her new slew of performances as something she *needs* to see realized.

"I've been training for two hours a day to get ready for this. I sing on the treadmill. I do cardio and weights on top of my rehearsals," she says, excitedly. "I want to get my whole body in prime condition so I can carry the show."

Fittingly crowned *The Monster Ball*, Gaga's tour, which kicks off in Montreal on Nov. 27, has Gaga's fan message boards buzzing—and betting—the Lady will weave her latest extraterrestrial inspirations into her set list. "I'm embarking on a new creative journey," Gaga states in a semi-robotic tone like she's about to board the Starship Enterprise. "I'm obsessed with metals and feather, pear and eggshells, as well as other raw materials that can be used in a futuristic way," she says, hinting at her newly-crafted stage gear. "I've found ways to tell stories with all of them."

Gaga has been inspired by design for as long as she can remember. One of her earliest childhood memories is watching her mother, Cynthia, rifling through a family closet stocked with Valentino and Ferragamo; designers that reflected >



her parent's Italian origins. "It was a marveling experience watching her get ready for the day," Gaga recalls. "I was fascinated by her gold earrings and tweed suits and the way she wore her hair. She always looked so much more pristine than all the other mothers. I have a lot of her in me."

Soon enough, Gaga experimented with her own wardrobe, discovering herself through various guises and garments. "I deviated [from being ladylike] for so many years. I went through periods where I was very sexy, then I became a hippie girl with ripped jeans and then went into a leopard tights and leotards phase... which I'm still in," she laughs quietly. "Fashion saved my life," she later admits. "When I was young, I was laughed at in school because I dressed dramatically."

"When I moved downtown..." she continues, likely thinking of when she left her family home in the Upper West Side to rent an apartment in NYC's core, "...it was complete liberation. I found all these shops on Eighth Street and I integrated fashion into my life in a healthy way because it made me feel powerful, ambitious and much more resilient."

With her newfound strength, she paved the road to *Gagaland*, discovering that it was filled with wild intentions. "Partying and vanity was my religion. I spent whole afternoons shopping for eyelashes," Gaga points out, naming legendary dance diva Grace Jones as a savior.

"Grace brought something to the table that society didn't fully understand," Gaga explains. "She worked with [artists] such as Andy Warhol, Keith Haring and Jean-Paul Goude when they were young and irrelevant. She brought them to the top. My goal is to do the same."

After leaving home and discovering the heroes and clothes that defined her, Gaga sought out places to find like-minded people. "Clubs were like libraries, the [club kids] were my textbooks," she says, referring to the crowd of aesthetes she surrounded herself with during her late teens, pre-Gaga.

Eventually, as Stefani Germanotta, she found herself in a right-time, right-place moment in 2006 when she was offered a job penning tracks for artists such as the Pussycat Dolls. She saved a few songs for herself, performing them at local bars and was soon signed by Interscope Records and paired with producer Rob Fusari to work on *The Fame*. Legend has it, once he heard the ingenue harmonise, Fusari compared her vocal sound with the classic Queen hit, "Radio Ga Ga." The name ended up becoming her badge of honor and no one has called her Stefani or Miss Germanotta since.

What followed was the most mammoth makeover pop music has ever seen. With the help of a hand-picked team of avant-garde-loving stylists (a tribe christened the Haus of Gaga), her Donatella Versace-meets-Liberace look was born.

Taking the leap was a big step she couldn't make without a close-knit group that influenced her cause. "My gay friends bring a sense of freedom in my life that I would absolutely die without. They are part of who I am and everything I do."

With her trusted support system, Gaga cleverly matched *The Fame's* high-octane electro-pop sound with high-octane attire, while dropping the singles "Just Dance," "Poker Face" and "LoveGame." Starting with her now-iconic, mirrored disco-ball bra top, Gaga's Haus dressed her in risk-taking and headline-making styles. Substituting Kermit the Frog for chinchilla (her wear-Muppet-not-fur moment) and swapping LBDs for a Hussein Chalayan-inspired bubble dress,

she consistently pushes the envelope of what is considered posh. Even during *FLARE's* photo shoot, Gaga insisted on channeling "Marilyn Monroe's darkest moments" in a studied mask rather than emulate a typical celebrity portrait.

"The last thing a young girl or a young boy needs is an image that says, 'I wish I had that' or 'she makes me feel bad about myself,'" she says. "I'm not a model and my job is not to be beautiful. We all need an image that screams, 'I'm an individual!' I do think Jennifer Aniston is beautiful—she's gorgeous—but I prefer to look interesting [rather] than pretty."

Although minimalists regard her as a fashion assassin of sorts, her visual philosophy has seeped into the minds

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and hearts of many stylish VIPs. Aside from reportedly being signed on as the spokesperson for a major cosmetics company and being immortalized in a comic zine (as a heroine named Lady Saga) sold at Marc Jacobs stores, she has also been able to stimulate her share of top-tier designers. For example, *Style.com* reported on a fashion movement they coined "the Gaga effect" during the Fall '09 collections in Paris. In the story, Jean Paul Gaultier, Christian Lacroix, Givenchy and even Chanel were cited as channeling Gaga's recessionista-bashing hyper-glamour. So the question remains: when is Gaga going to create her own collection?

"At some point, I will," she says. "Right now, I'm more concerned with using my fame to promote young designers such as Gary Card, an artist who designed a piece I used on stage." When pushed on why she thinks her public wants a Gaga-driven clothing line, she doesn't flinch. "There hasn't been a commercial artist lately that has embodied avant-garde and couture so insistently as myself."

If another singer can make the same claim, it's Madonna, whose influence on fashion could fill a set of encyclopedias. The veteran pop singer is also someone Gaga idolizes—and has been compared to—ever since the *Papa-papa-razzi* laid its lens on the Lady. When Gaga and Madonna were introduced at Marc Jacobs' Spring '10 show this past September, the media was expecting a clash of the diva titans (something the pair later spoofed in a *Saturday Night Live* skit). Instead, while the world around them was going Gaga, the pair chatted like friends at a fourth of July picnic.

"I wasn't nervous at all," Gaga says of the meeting. "Madonna is brilliant. She's everything and more than I imagined her to be and has said such kind words about me. We had a lovely chat about Michael Jackson and the VMAs. Nobody will ever be as groundbreaking as Madonna for sex. But we can try to apply new contexts, lifestyles, music and different mediums to it," she says.

However, Gaga's own ambitions (which seem to supersede Madonna's), aim to please and challenge her fans, as well as herself. It's a mandate she feels is necessary for her main goal: bridging the gap between pop star and pop artist. "You could say I'm both," she says. "I don't really know how people view me, but that's how I view myself. □

SCENE
exclusive

Jacket, Jaiden
Rva James.
Mask, Edward
Fong. Earrings
and rings,
Gaga's own.
Opposite page:
Bodysuit, Jean
Paul Gaultier.
Belt, Atsuko
Kudo; cuffs,
Patricia Field.



SCENE
exclusive



Trench coat,
Jean Paul Gaultier.
Feather helmet,
Philip Treacy
London. Rings,
Gaga's own. *For
where-to-buy, see
Stylesource. Hair,
Peter Savic, www.soloartists.com;
makeup, Billy B,
Art Department;
styling, Anna
Trevelyn; art
director, Tanya
Watt.*

Check out Lady
Gaga's personal
style at [flare.com/
ladygaga](http://flare.com/ladygaga)