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## LEGENDARY LENNOX

A one-on-one with pop-music royal Annie Lennox. By ELIO IANNACCI

IT ISN'T LIKE ANNIE LENNOX TO CAUSE A SCENE. YET THE singer-songwriter—seated in a quiet corner of the Chateau Marmont's bar area—is currently at the centre of one. She buries her flushed face in her hands as surrounding patrons of the storied Los Angeles hotel (including the nearby Quincy Jones) watch her crumple in sheer embarrassment. The source of the kerfuffle is former *American Idol* judge Randy Jackson, who interrupts Lennox's exclusive interview with *FASHION* to shout out, "She's the greatest artist in the world—the queen of pop. Nobody comes close." In response, a group of Italian tourists begins to clap, and the former front-woman of the venerated pop duo Eurythmics is visibly mortified. Then, like the steely, androgynous figure she created in the video for Eurythmics's biggest hit, "Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This),"

in which Lennox wears a man's suit, the Scot pounds her fist on the table, pulls it together and utters a crisp "Well, then, where were we?"

Madonna, Elton John and even young guns such as Lady Gaga would have lived for this applause, but Lennox feels it wasn't earned. "I'm not an attention-seeker as a person, just as a performer," says the Grammy, Oscar and Golden Globe award-winner. "That's why I don't like red-carpet situations. I won't »

show up to the opening of a plastic bag,” she says. “I’m a big believer in *creating* the moment, not *being* the moment.”

Lennox’s latest creation is *Nostalgia*, a disc for which she skilfully reworked jazz classics, pulling from exalted American composers like George Gershwin and Duke Ellington. As her haunting rendition of “Summertime” can attest, she didn’t set out to do a blasé, breezy jazz project that paid homage to the greats. Lennox, who is celebrating her 60th birthday on Christmas Day, has always been a nonconformist. Aside from the status quo-shaking Eurythmics hits she wrote with Dave Stewart, her artistic peaks include the duo’s masterpiece *Savage* (a concept album that explores gender and multiple personality disorder), as well as her debut solo disc of 1992, *Diva* (which delves into motherhood sans the Anne Geddes clichés or the trappings of Sylvia Plath).

There are more joyful offerings on *Nostalgia* than in the past, such as “Georgia on My Mind,” and Lennox admits this is because she’s happily married to her third husband, Dr. Mitch Besser, and rarely needs to seek the “dark muse.” “I certainly feel more at peace with myself,” she says, speaking excitedly of her wedding, where she wore an outfit designed by Stephanie Cooper. She deems “Strange Fruit” to be *Nostalgia*’s most “ambitious” track; it’s a protest song Billie Holiday famously recorded in 1939. The recording, which Lennox identifies as a “historic document,” was handled with kid gloves. “It’s pre-civil rights—the first anthem of its type,” she explains. “What it addresses is not only racism; it’s about the expression of violence that is played out 24/7 across the globe—whether its racism, homophobia or domestic violence.”

A passionate philanthropist and campaigner for human rights, Lennox is hopeful that the current discussion regarding gender equality has hit the zeitgeist. “It has been a long time coming,” she says, noting that she’s spent the day answering related questions about Beyoncé, since she was recently quoted as calling Mrs. Carter’s work “feminist lite.”

“I do think Beyoncé is off the scale as an artist, but if it all serves the debate well and keeps the issue on the table, then that’s a good thing,” says Lennox of her controversial statement. She cites actress Emma Watson (“so poised and inspiring”) and 17-year-old Pakistani activist Malala Yousafzai (“the biggest feminist on Earth”) as champions.

Lennox’s relationship with fashion has been a dysfunctional one. She sees clothes as communicative weapons and keeps her artillery in a warehouse, where her collection is overseen by an archivist. “She’s adding to it constantly, so the clothes feel like a story that keeps getting told,” says Lennox. The singer’s own aesthetic has been the subject of a traveling museum exhibit called *The House of Annie Lennox*. One characteristic of her style is that she’s never been one for labels: Lennox refused to be the face of Armani and Versace (“I didn’t think it was appropriate”). She also shrugs at Louis Vuitton’s Lennox-inspired menswear collection of Fall 2007 and Jean Paul Gaultier’s Spring 2013 collection, which was, in part, a tribute to her masculine looks in videos for Eurythmics hits such as “Love Is a Stranger.”

“In those early days, I was my own stylist and art director,” she says of her countless personas. “But I never, ever let anyone tell me what to wear—ever,” she insists. “It’s like handing over your vision to a total stranger.” □

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