



THE ONE TO WATCH...

Louise Alexander-O'Loughlin talks to HARPER, a newcomer to the music industry who has put herself firmly on the 'one to watch' list. The alternative Pop/R'n'B artist has performed at premier league football games, and on a Drake cover with YouTube sensation and pop star Conor Maynard, receiving over 43 million views. MTV has its eye on her as a promising new artist for 2017 and Clash Magazine describes her as 'evocative, intimate pop music with a stylish twist'. The world is clearly her oyster as she releases her 'No Love In The Jungle' single in aid of the NSPCC and The National Autistic Society this November.

Q Who is Harper?

A I'm a singer/songwriter, signed to ICU Label based in South London. I write and perform my own music which is alternative RnB/Pop.

Q Tell me a bit about your roots.

A I grew up in Bedminster, Bristol and moved to a small town in South Wales when I was seven after my parents separated. I lived there until I was 18 when I moved to London.

Q That must have been daunting.

A Yes it was, extremely daunting, and initially unfriendly and slightly isolating. However, if I wanted a career in music, then that was where I needed to be. My mum pushed me, literally, off to Westminster University to take my degree in commercial music. In fact, that's what I based my new single 'No Love In The Jungle' on.

Q When did you realise you could sing?

A I always knew I was in tune when I was little. Then, during one holiday, there was a karaoke and my dad told me to go up and sing for fun. I still remember it to this day. I sang 'Falling' by Alicia Keys with all my heart and my dad nearly fell off his seat.

Q No Love In The Jungle? Tell me about your single.

A It's officially released on 28 November and is a rolling, dark edged song about survival in the city. It's about betrayal and loneliness in the shadow of the concrete jungle. It sounds a bit depressing, but it's actually a very upbeat song with exotic drum patterns. I always aim to write a song people can't stop singing to the point where it becomes irritating. That's the secret of a great pop song.

Q Do you feel the same way you did about London?

A I love London, I always have done. I just find it sad that people don't talk to each other, for instance on the Tube. If I just started speaking to someone, they would think I was mad. I suppose coming from a small village in Wales, it's a huge change. I get the whole Monday morning 'being miserable thing', but it makes me sad how we eventually all become like each other. Why does it have to be like this?

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Q You've already released two EPs, so this release isn't your debut. I know I sound like I know what I'm talking about, but what's an EP?

A An EP is a 'taster' of my music – it's not a full album and yes, I have released two, Blood Sweat Tears and SKIN, freely available online. No, it's not my debut single, but it's the first single I'm releasing for sale to the general public. I've dedicated this single to charity, thereby aiding and bringing people together.

Q Harper, did you set out to be famous?

A No not at all... I just wanted to do what I love as a job – that's the dream isn't it? I completed my commercial music degree and to be honest was lucky to have been found by ICU Label.

Q What is ICU Label?

A An independent record label headed up by Elliott Govinden, founder and CEO. He's a businessman as well as music producer, and has a great ear for music. I'm so grateful to him and his team at ICU Label for their support.

Q Did you ever consider going onto the X-Factor or Britain's Got Talent?

A Not really. I really applaud people who go on those programmes as it shows guts. I guess for me it's always been about pursuing songwriting and then ICU Label heard me sing, they signed me and that was it. Now I get to do both.

Q Do you write your own songs?

A Yes, I do. Melodies and lyrics are so important. As a deep thinker, I write about things that resonate with me. I, as with many artists, use songwriting as a form of therapy. I love to write down how I feel and as a consequence my thoughts turn to lyrics.

Q Why did you choose the NSPCC and The National Autistic Society to support?

A I really admire the work both charities carry out. I was physically and verbally abused at school which made me feel bad, but I'm fully aware that what I went through is mild compared to the horrific treatment some children are experiencing both at home and school





on a regular basis. The National Autistic Society is doing some incredible work in understanding autism and enabling children to cope far better with life going into adulthood. Part of being an artist is being able to share messages and if this single does that then I'm happy.

Q Peter Wanless, NSPCC CEO and Mark Lever, The National Autistic Society CEO, are right behind you and supporting your new single. How does that feel?

A Amazing. I feel very honoured and happy they both recognise I want to do all I can to help both charities.

Q What is your most exciting performance to date?

A I was asked to perform in front of a sell-out crowd at West Ham Football Club during one of their premiership matches. The crowd and the buzz were incredible and I took the opportunity to sing a slightly controversial song themed around female empowerment: #GirlPower.

Q Would you call yourself a feminist?

A I would say I'm more of a realist. I just can't stand people being treated unfairly because of some characteristic they may have that sets them apart from other people.

A Could you give me an example?

A Networking is so important in this industry and I was invited to a club that is a massive networking venue for artists to meet and generally hang out. When I found out that two of my friends had been turned away from the club for being 'too fat', I found that very disturbing and declined the invitation.

Q Would you say you are a role model for teenagers?

A I would be honoured to be considered a role model for teens. I have younger siblings who I try to set a good example for. Over the years, I've been a size six and a size 14 and suffered with image issues >>>



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Harper

Q You can certainly sing, but can you dance?

A Yes, at university I focused solely on music, however, when we did the single ‘SKIN’ no one knew I could dance and I think I shocked the team – not to mention the suspenders and hot pants... (sorry mum!).

Q How would you describe Harper v/s Sam?

A I am both; the girl you see in the ‘SKIN’ video who is a little sassy and feisty, but also the girl that writes deep, soul-searching lyrics. I’m equally at home in hot pants as I am in ripped jeans and biker boots and absolutely love hunting for vintage clothes.

Q What are you excited about that’s coming up in your diary?

A So much! Obviously about ‘No Love in the Jungle’ being released in November, but not only that. I’ve been invited to the ‘This Morning’ show at the ITV studios to meet Ruth and Eamonn. I’ve grown up watching them and can’t wait. I’m not too proud to say I might even be a little starstruck. I’m also really excited to be going to the MOBO Awards this year. I’ve watched on a TV screen since I can remember, so I’m thrilled to be invited.

Q How do you spend your time off?

A As an artist there is no such thing as time off. I’m always thinking about my next song. If I’m not in the studio, I’m networking at places like Fashion Week in London and club events (well, the ones that don’t judge people too much) and I’m constantly on my social media pages or at the gym. I do love cooking and spending time with family and friends.

Q Are you careful with what you eat?

A Well, I love my food almost as much as I love my music. I have such a sweet tooth, which can be dangerous, but life’s for living.

Q Where would you like to be in a year’s time?

A I’d like to be recognised for my music talent and songwriting. I’ve always said to myself “I’ll never go to Glastonbury until I can perform at Glastonbury”. So fingers crossed! ❖

essence INFO

Follow Harper on social media @HarperTheArtist and visit the official website at www.HarperTheArtist.com

growing up. I can relate to the pressure on teenagers, even more so today with the growth of social media. I have reached where I want to be physically and mentally now, eat healthily and don’t smoke or touch drugs, but I may have the odd glass of red wine here and there. Girls (and boys) need to love themselves and work on themselves from the inside and not just the outside.

Q What was it like working with Conor Maynard?

A He’s done so well and really is a YouTube sensation. He and I get on so well together. We have banter, but I respect what he has done and I get inspiration from him. He’s been amazing and really supportive of my campaign.

Q Were you surprised when your Drake cover song with Conor hit over 43 million views on YouTube?

A Yes, completely... it was amazing to see the numbers rising. It was such a success that we decided to do another cover ‘All We Know’ by The Chainsmokers, which reached over one million views in just 48 hours.