

Charli XCX

Photography — Daria
Kobayashi Ritch
Styling — Sean Knight





Givenchy shirt, skirt & scarf

Charli XCX occupies a powerful place in pop. A songwriter since age 14, she has always had a mastery of her sound and destiny that wasn't always typical of the space she occupies. Now releasing her third studio album, and with collaborations with Lizzo and Christine and the Queens under her belt, she's in full command of her style and sound and still hungry for more.

Interview by Gemma Lacey

What's always been apparent with Charli XCX is the energy, effervescence, and sass which infuses all her tunes. She's spirited, supportive of other women and not afraid to speak her mind. She's also a seriously hard worker, often spending hours in the studio, which is one of the reasons she loves living in LA. "I like that I can work 24 hours a day if I want to. And literally just call up anyone and be like, 'Do you want to go to the studio, do you want to make some music?' And, someone will say yes because, I don't know, I feel like people are always wanting to create here. And there's such a wide breadth of different types of musicians and people here who want to do different types of things."

The community and collaboration in LA is something Charli had always craved, as she puts it, "When I was younger and I first started making music, I was desperately in search of a clique of people or a crew to surround myself with, because when I started music I was really obsessed with Ed Banger Records and all of the artists that they had on their label because of the music, but also I just loved the fact that they were this family of similar like-minded artists all collaborating together." This sense of family and

creativity has yielded some amazing collaborations of late, firstly with the irrepressible Lizzo, who Charli describes as effervescent. "Her energy is palpable. She's so true to what you see. She's loud, she's confident, she's this positive force of energy and it's really amazing and infectious to be around. I was really obsessing over her when she began releasing the music from this current album. We got together in the studio in LA and she came through and she wrote her verse just one leg up on the couch. Just freestyling it. I don't know, it was really cool, she's such a spontaneous writer which I really like and I can relate to."

We talk about what it's like for her to be a fan and she regales me with a story of running into Bill Murray in a hotel lobby, where he complimented her shoes and sent her into a "total meltdown". "I'm not somebody who is going to be, 'Oh sorry, I've never heard of you.' I can't do it, I can't play it cool like that. And also I think it's weird. If you like someone just tell them. No matter who it is, people love it. It's nice to be told nice things and, yeah, there's levels and no one ever wants to be sycophantic but if I admire someone's work I'm always going to just tell them and

I don't feel awkward about it. And if they're a dick about it then that's their issue."

She laments that she didn't ask him to go party with her that night but then I ask her what's the best fan moment she's had in response to her music and her story doesn't disappoint. "Somebody told me that they saw my set at a festival quite recently and they were really high and having the best time ever and so they grabbed the person next to them and gave them a blow job whilst I was performing one of my new songs. A gay guy. And I was like, 'Great, I love that. You fucking slay.'"

Off stage, Charli keeps things more mellow, describing her move to LA four years ago with some of her closest friends, "I think it keeps me grounded and I wouldn't know how to do it any other way. I like that familiarity, I like that homeliness and they also keep me in check. They're not yes people." We talk about the importance of mental health for artists, and I ask how she balances her desire to create with taking care of herself. "I just go through phases where sometimes I'm feeling really really creative and I need to just do all the shit that's in my brain. Whether



This page: Christopher Kane dress & coat, Frye boots
Opposite page: Versace coat, Christopher Kane dress





that's to make an album in a day or write treatments down for videos, and I'm feeling so creative, it's all I want to do and I just push and go until I'm so exhausted." Though she realises that's not sustainable "so I just want to eat, and watch movies and party with my friends and do nothing. Nothing creative, don't want to answer an email. Absolutely nothing. So it's really one or the other." She's not shy to take time for herself too, once cancelling a tour because it was too much and she was depressed. "I was really unhappy and I basically had a breakdown. And I cancelled it mid-tour, I just had to. Some people were really angry about that and understandably so and other people got it more. At that time I didn't love the music that I was making though, and I think that makes such a difference."

It's clear that working hard is part of her personality though and her take on that is a more positive one. "I'm like, fuck, I'm going to die soon, why am I wasting this day doing this? Let's go, I want to make something."

When speaking of her relationship with her fans, she clearly loves the dialogue she has with them too. "We definitely do have our own online language. I post a lot of the art they make of me and they make memes of me that I find genuinely funny, they're just cool, they get it. Sometimes I'm like, I want to hire them to run my social media."

As a fan herself, Sophie is an artist that's captured her heart and can make her cry when she performs, because the music is so loud and she's "blown away". However, it was pop princess Britney Spears that

first had her heart and gave Charli her "first education in pop music before even really knowing that it was." For Charli, pop music has its own meaning, she consumes music by devouring albums and listening to them non stop – most recently obsessing over Tyler the Creator's *Igor*, Jai Paul's new music and Janet Jackson's *Control* which fits her notion of a great pop song. "Something I want to play in a car and drive really fast to, that's a pretty good test. If I'm putting your song on in a car and driving, it's a good sign."

As she leaves, I ask what the other essentials are for a great pop song and she replies with lightning speed, "Something that I can know every word to within five minutes. Something that I remember the melody to. Something that makes me either want to dance or cry."





This page: Givenchy shirt, skirt, scarf & shoes, Wolford stockings, Syren Latex Couture gloves
Opposite page: Versace coat, Christopher Kane dress

Makeup: Holly Silius at Frank Reys using Noir et Blanc de Chanel and Chanel Sublimage L'eau Micellaire
Hair: Ramsell Martinez at Lowe and Co using Bumble & Bumble
Stylist's assistant: Deniz Gumustas