

Koffee — Blessed

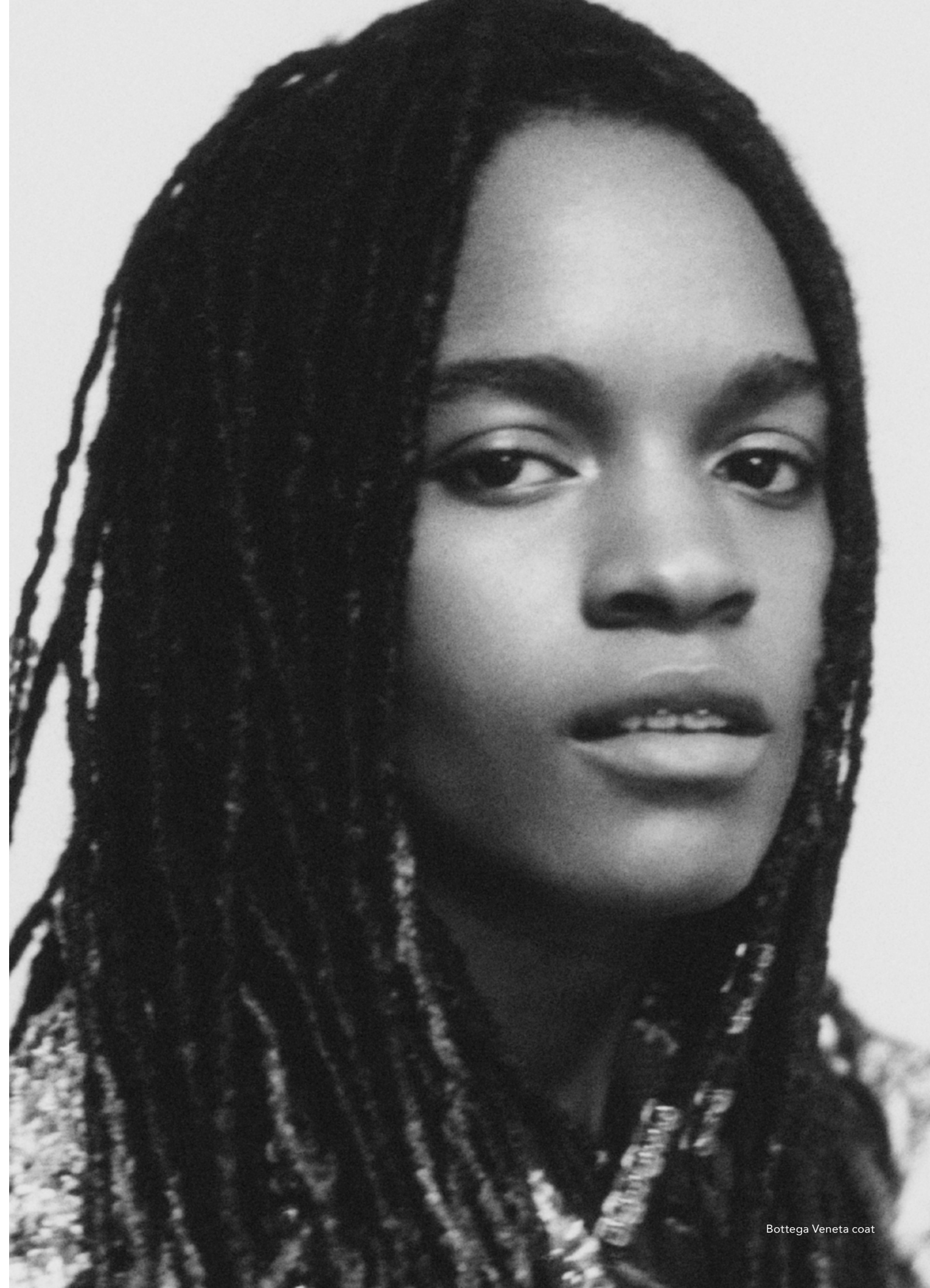
Photography — John P Heyes
Styling — Yana McKillop



Koffee is wearing Bottega Veneta throughout



Coat & mules by Bottega Veneta



Bottega Veneta coat



Jacket, trousers, necklace & earrings all by Bottega Veneta

When Koffee first burst into our streams in 2018, the immediate reaction was one of “wow”. The scale of her songwriting and ambition was evident, this wasn’t lost on the world either and in 2020 her debut project *Rapture* saw her make history as the youngest ever woman to win a Grammy, taking home the best reggae award and beating out stalwarts of the genre. Taking on heavyweights such as Sly and Robbie and Steel Pulse, her EP was a breath of fresh new energy and jubilant positivity that captivated fans and judges alike.

Interview by Gemma Lacey

Whilst songs like *Burning* may blaze with a fiery energy, in person she radiates a calmness and the laid-back confidence you’d associate with Jamaica. Many people comment on the fact that she’s barely 5ft but that’s only significant because the sentiment and ambition of her songwriting is so large by contrast. To her, that’s evidence of a ‘blessing’ which I learned is a staple of her vocabulary.

Crowned as the next-gen queen of reggae, she’s driven by a desire to share her love of the genre and make it her own. It’s clear looking at her work and listening to her that much of it was driven by her love as a fan first and an artist second.

It’s not just her love of Jamaican music that motivates her though; breakout song *Legend* was inspired by Usain Bolt, and it was his ultimate sharing of her video that catapulted her to view. She describes how when he won you could hear people celebrating by clashing pot lids together and that as soon as she saw he’d shared her track she did the same. This collaboration ultimately led to a fan of Bolt’s who invited her to work on a juggling

riddim he was working on with artists Lutan Fyah and Jah Vinci – someone she’d long been a fan of. The result of this collaboration was her song *Burning* which she wrote to boost herself up after she failed to get into sixth form. “*Burning* was an inspiration to myself, to push myself forward to say, ‘You can’t let this out your flame.’ Literally it was me parking a fire within myself to go forward and excel in something else, because education didn’t look like it was working out. I say ‘Me have a burning sound, me a burn the city down.’ I meant, like, lighting a fire in Kingston, bringing that energy.” The song was a breakout hit but it also cemented the positive narrative that Koffee is celebrated for. Reggae has always been something that she felt she could learn from; the melodies soothed her, it helped change her perspective and it sends a message. If that notion of sharing a message was one that resonates for her since she began writing, growing up in Jamaica made her aware of how important it was to tell her story and let the world see things through her lens. “Music is my biggest source of healing, I tend to listen to it a lot

for guidance and to influence my moods, I believe I do really rely on it in that sense. Also writing allows me a form of expression that gives me some sense of ease as well. So music is the answer for me.”

It would be hard to ignore that where she hails from has a history of socio-economic violence in parts, and whilst she says she was sheltered from that directly thanks to her mother, she also acknowledges how important it is to address that and to spread messages of hope and positivity whilst highlighting the serious issues there. “With a lot of my music, it’s about entertaining people while highlighting problems in order to try and find a solution. I genuinely want to make the world a better place.”

She’s very intentional about her sound and lyrics, deciding what vibe she wants before she gets started. “My process is definitely more emotional even in writing. So the vibe I get from the beat, or like once I’m singing my melodies back to myself, the vibe I get from it – I use that to gauge how people respond, how people will feel and I think since *Rapture*, I’ve been trying to keep it a little bit more optimistic.”





Jacket, trousers, mules & earrings all by Bottega Veneta



Jacket, trousers & earrings all by Bottega Veneta



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Puffer, dress, bag, mules & earrings all by Bottega Veneta



Coat & earrings by Bottega Veneta

One thing is clear, Koffee is emblematic of Jamaica but she's also on a mission to make sure the world understands it on her terms. One example of this is when discussing the Grammy's, where she's received her second nomination in the reggae category along with another female artist, Spice, who's renowned as a dancehall queen. In Koffee's eyes and in Jamaica as a whole it's recognised that dancehall and reggae are separate entities and she feels it would be good if they could be appreciated that way. No shade to the Grammy's but for her, authenticity is everything. "In Jamaica we celebrate two main genres which are reggae, which is a more popular genre and then there's dancehall, which is a little bit more underground in a sense, but still popular and they both have different approaches. So reggae is more a genre of peace, positive and certain messaging that can help you through life or relevant messaging and dancehall is more about having fun, partying and finding clever ways to kinda speak about the situations going on in Jamaica, in the streets and stuff like that. They're both amazing but I think the difference should be acknowledged."

This is partly down to the simple way she was raised, Koffee saying she learned how to find her own happiness and "not worry about what the neighbours were thinking". Awards and endorsements are not what motivates her, though that's not to say she doesn't feel joy for what's come her way. From the chance to be on stage with Burna Boy and Wizkid, and how she thinks it's "so cool" they have been so welcoming to new artists to tearing up when she

recalls Protoje, one of her favourite artists, rushing from the airport to be in her video for *Toast*.

This coming year looks to have many new highs in store for her and the chance to perform live again and show people "the time of their lives". This year will see her take to the stage at Coachella and tour with Harry Styles, who personally requested her, but she's taking it all in her stride. To her mind, "God will always find a way" and it's this sense of faith and self-assurance that drives her and the confidence which informs her songwriting.

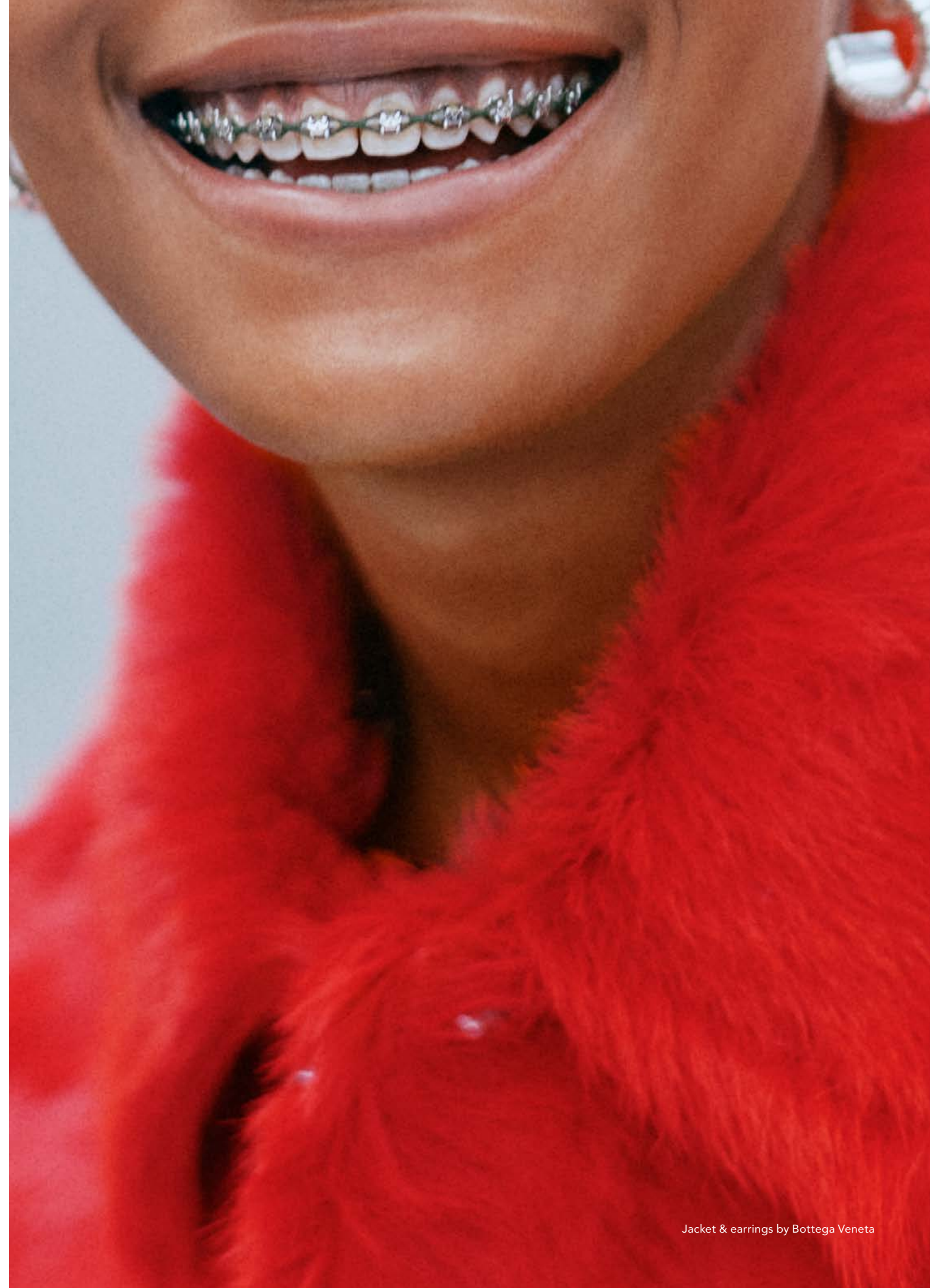
One project she is more tight-lipped about is the rumoured collaboration with Rihanna, "There are good things coming, that's all I can say, and those are always worth the wait." When it comes to her own record *Gifted* she is more effusive, describing how for years the world has borrowed from reggae's sound but now the next gen of reggae artists have spent time listening to pop and "tapping into where sound has been going. Music has a way where it moves, regardless of the genre, to progress."

Her own sound has progressed too, as have her lyrics. For her at its heart this record is her way of sharing her message, and keeping her focus firmly on positive communication. There's less of the political commentary found on her previous release *Rapture* and instead she's focused more on what the solution must be and less on the problem and the anger surrounding it. "I want to bring people something that will make them feel uplifted." She's always claimed she didn't want to limit herself and from the early stages of her career declared, "I see myself doing many things in the future, I'm

not going to narrow myself to one thing. I want to try it all." *Gifted* is evidence of this and as she builds a body of work, the breadth of her influences and the unique way in which she combines them and pays homage to the traditional reggae she was raised on continues to surprise and delight. There's even a nod to reggae godfather Bob Marley on *X10* where she uses the opening guitar line from *Redemption*. "That song was already lingering in the background for me. In the end I thought I wanted to keep it because the inspiration that I felt from listening to that song, I felt like I would be able to pass it on to some of my listeners, while adding my own inspiration or my own influence to it at the same time." True to Koffee's style, it's something you can barely place before she takes you in another direction altogether.

Style-wise she's also evolving and learning to enjoy trying new labels, crediting her favourite outfit on our shoot as the navy blue coat but also sharing that she's been moved to add more orange to her closet, "I'm from Jamaica, I like to bring the sunshine with me."

The whole record and the way she's envisioning her performances is a journey, encompassing her view of the world as she calls it, "You start your day saying your prayers, tap into a little love song and then the party vibe". In small terms and on a grander scale this record speaks to a lifecycle for her and all the joy she finds in it along the way. Given her previous records formed part of the joyous soundtrack that was the pre-pandemic summer of 2019 it seems fitting Koffee is back with a slew of new hits, primed and ready for the next summer of love.





This page: coat & dress by Bottega Veneta
Opposite page: jacket, trousers, mules & earrings all by Bottega Veneta





Jacket & trousers by Bottega Veneta



Jacket & earrings by Bottega Veneta

Makeup: Nadia Braz at Moja Management

Hair: Shamara Roper at Future Rep

Movement Director: Anna Engerstrom

Set Designer: Lizzy Gilbert

Photographer's assistants: Sinclair Smith & Joe Petini

Stylist's assistant: Sofi Chetnar

Production: North Six