

# Natalia Dyer — Running Up That Hill

Photography — Emily Soto  
Styling — Heathermary Jackson







This page: Noir Kei Ninomiya dress, AGL boots, Catbird ring  
Opposite page: Prada coat, skirt & shoes, stylist's own tights





Valentino jumpsuit, AGL shoes, Omega watch

Natalia Dyer's graceful entrance to our screens as Nancy in *Stranger Things* saw her as the quintessential 80's teenager, complete with nuanced emotions and sensitivities. Four seasons later, Nancy has stepped into her power and it's clear this isn't unlike the path trodden by Natalia, as we discover in our interview.

### Interview by Gemma Lacey

Female characters often tend to fall in a few camps: the fey ingenue, the funny girl or the badass, but Natalia Dyer is proving it's more nuanced than that. In her breakout role as Nancy, we've seen her character explore all the usual coming-of-age situations, whilst under the threat of something far scarier than most of us have dealt with and embracing them with a feminine power that's impressive.

In terms of her professional journey, the trajectory of the show was one that took her by surprise too. "I had no idea how big it would be, it kind of took on a life of its own once it was out in the world because people were watching it and because of how they reacted to it, which is a good thing, I think, because it would've been way too much pressure, trying to make the show under any sort of assumption that it would be as massive as it is."

As she puts it, "The fact of just being in our little bubble in Atlanta and making a show that we were all proud of and thought was great but there was really no concept of where it was going to go. It's still kind of crazy to think about."

If the dramatic success of the show was one notable thing, her character's trajectory has been another, as we've watched Nancy go from wrestling with advances from amorous teenage boys to

facing demogorgons [demon-like fantasy creatures] head-on. For Natalia there are certainly similarities that this empowerment takes in her own life too. "I think Nancy's grown and I've also grown in myself with her," she says. "So there are definitely some parallels in how she's come into herself and how I feel like I've come into myself over the course of filming the show. I really admire how she's taken these events in her life and she's just grown more confident and more self-assured and more tuned into her intuition."

Another reason she credits is the depth with which her character is explored by the writers. "I think it's really nice to be able to play through that arc for a female character, sometimes female characters have classically been just so underwritten and with *Stranger Things* it's an ensemble show obviously, which is one of the magical parts about it."

On-screen, the relationships of the characters and the way they work together in the face of extraordinary circumstances is integral to the show's chemistry, but Natalia is invested in the nuance between the characters in their more ordinary moments too. "I always love when Nancy has scenes with Karen Wheeler, her mum, when she gets emotional, and when

she gets to go back to the sort of fragile internal feelings, it's nice to be reminded that these characters, despite all of the surreal, sci-fi other-dimensional things that are going on, they're just people."

In true form as a teenage girl Nancy's wardrobe is a core focus and as the show has evolved so has her style. We discuss her outfits and colour palette. "She's a badass, so she still puts herself together in a certain way, but she always wears a lot of pinks and purples throughout her journey. I think it's really interesting because these soft pastels are associated with being fragile and feminine but she's doing all of these really cool things in these outfits, that's fun for me."

In more recent seasons her character is sporting heeled boots even for some of the more active scenes, we discuss how there's often a commentary on women wearing heels in action scenes, case in point Bryce Dallas Howard in *Jurassic Park*. But Natalia has a thoughtful take on this. "I almost never wear heels in my own life if I can avoid it, every time that I wear heels for events and things, I'm like, 'I should have really practised this'. In one way you could see that as a trap that society has put women in, but the truth is that we'll take this and we'll just be stronger. We'll be in heels and still do all the





Hermès jacket, trousers & boots, Catbird earrings & rings, Omega watch



Coach coat & dress, AGL boots, Catbird earrings, Omega watch



things. I think there's two really powerful things about that. Even if I'm not the most comfortable in heels all the time, whenever I see women walking around New York, on cobblestones in these giant heels, I'm like, 'Yeah, you go girls, that is impressive.'"

Another role where Natalia has played with the expectations levied on women is in *Yes, God, Yes*, where she plays a Catholic schoolgirl discovering the joys of masturbation. Part of what piqued her interest with this film was the director Karen Maine and from the moment she received the script she was engaged. "I remember reading it and my immediate thought was, 'Yes, absolutely let me be part of this!' It's a funny movie but it's also really saying something that I think hits home for a lot of people."

For her the role became a reflection of a movement she sees. "I think we're moving into a space where females have a bit more of a voice, where we're communicating more." We discuss why she feels this is the case, and if social media is a big part of bringing discussions like this to the forefront. "I think a lot of it has to do with social media and the way people are exchanging ideas more freely," which is interesting for her as she's not a huge fan of social media. "For me

personally, it doesn't mix well, my brain and social media don't tend to work very well together."

Part of it is the pressure social media puts on artists to have an opinion on anything newsworthy. "I think there is something to the sense of feeling pressure to be well read up on everything and have the right ideas about everything. I really never ever want to project that I know everything about anything and I'm the first to admit that I'm really still figuring it out."

Her candour is refreshing and it's clear she likes to explore things in her own way and not be forced to be a spokesperson. "I think there's a lot of times, especially as an actor where you're just like, 'Whoa, I can talk about what I think in my own head, but please don't necessarily look to me for advice'. I'm not any more educated on a lot of things than a lot of people. And I think it's unfair to expect that of me."

That's not to say she doesn't have her own passions or things she feels strongly about, in the arc of our interview there's a distinctly female perspective to her views that are with nuance and sensitivity. "I do feel pretty passionate about women's issues in the world but I don't think my voice should matter more than literally anybody else's on these topics. I think when

you're asked about it it's hard not to be passionate, but I think for a lot of artists sometimes it feels like there's a pressure to speak for a generation and know a lot more and be more sure about things."

For Natalia, what happens in life informs her craft so it's natural she's protective of her inspiration and the ways she learns in the world. Part of the greatest joy in her work is witnessing other actors. "Working with people like Winona [Ryder] and David [Harbour] who are established and seeing how they carry themselves and what they talk about, seeing how much they're able to be there and give what they need to give, but also how much time they spend in their own life. I think it's important to be able to figure out what your boundaries are. And of course, your boundaries might be incredibly different from somebody else's boundaries."

Natalia feels most optimistic when she's "just letting things kind of happen and come and just not really attaching too much expectation." And in terms of advice for the other young women watching Nancy? "Just be compassionate to yourself. I think we could all use a bit more of that in our lives, I really don't have anything more. I'm also learning and I think that's essential and it's good to be OK with that."



Valentino jumpsuit, Catbird ring, AGL shoes, Omega watch

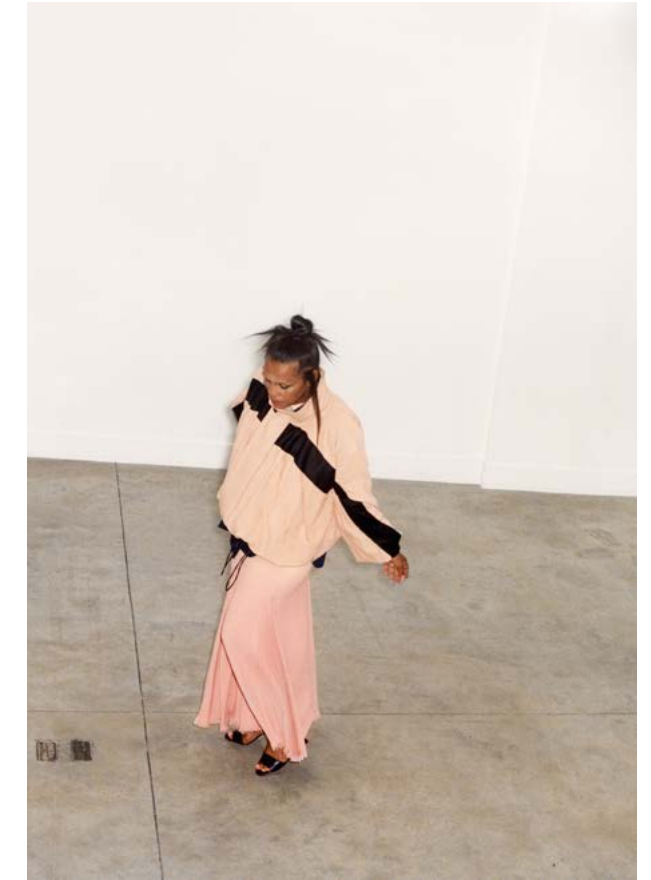




This page: Coach coat & dress, AGL boots  
Opposite page: Prada coat & skirt, Omega watch

Makeup: Misha Shahzada at Kalpana  
Hair: Jacob Rozenberg at Statement Artists  
Photographer's assistant: Alex Powell  
Stylist's assistant: Delaney Williams





This page: Andreas Kronthaler for Vivienne Westwood jacket, Lemaire shirt, Marni dress, Manolo Blahnik shoes, Van Cleef & Arpels bracelet & ring  
Opposite page: Acne jacket, top & skirt, Lemaire shirt, Anderson and Co tie, Shaun Leane earrings





Louis Vuitton jacket, Marques Almeida dress, Anderson and Co tie, Diana Strang belt, Ara Vartanian earring

There's always been a magnetism about Neneh Cherry that's never waned, driven by a fierce femininity and emotional complexity that makes her so relatable. Back in the spotlight with *Versions*, where some of her most iconic work is being reworked by a host of new female artists, we find she still has a lot to say about art, inspiration and being a woman driven by a unique power she alone possesses.

### Interview by Gemma Lacey

Music has been part of Neneh Cherry's life for as long as she can remember, starting with touring with stepdad Don Cherry as a teen. But it's her own curiosity and willingness to collaborate that saw her launch her own career, starting with a stint in The Slits, a pivotal moment for her. "It was a pretty magical experience and I was completely blown away watching them play every night, watching Tessa and listening to Ari and Viv, they were just so strong and unusual and it was just so cool."

The fact that The Slits were all female also made a strong impression on Neneh, setting the tone for her incredible career. "It changed me, being a woman and then watching a band of these amazing young women. I was only 15, so I was super impressionable." On that tour she and Ari became inseparable, living together in London, sharing clothes, and absorbing what was happening at the time. "There was definitely a shift out of what had been a punk scene into all the sort of various bands and people we were listening to and discovering and exploring further sounds like reggae and the whole sound system culture."

We discuss how and why she was so receptive to that and she immediately credits her upbringing.

"I grew up in a world where there was a limitless space around creativity and improvisation played a huge part in that. But also study – I feel very thankful that I grew up in an environment where yes, there was freedom and it was sought after, where inspiration and passion were taken very seriously, but there was also a serious process and a lot of time was put into study and understanding different sounds that came from within the different cultures and then making them your own."

For her, the study and discovery of that world is "An endless journey. That's something that you can continue playing with and experimenting and kind of flexing, you know? I think that I definitely have that with me." Even when she was less prolific and was asked, "Why didn't you make an album for 17 years?", she says much of that creative block came from "feeling restricted and having an incredible sense of needing to be freer and wanting to let go and getting caught in a kind of a Catch-22 where I was kind of overthinking this sort of weird obligation that wasn't really an obligation. Getting caught up in the end product of what I was producing and where it was gonna go and being a bit over-cautious by thinking there was an expectation of me."

Creative blocks are common and I ask how she found her way out of that rut. "I wasn't necessarily thinking about them as problems, but I think there were issues that got in the way of being in that space where you shouldn't have to think that everything has to be perfect and that mistakes can be made," she says. "It's not just about producing seamlessly perfect records and I think I've always belonged in a more experimental lane. So I just got really into collaborating and working on other projects."

Collaboration and experimentation were her exit routes from creative frustration but also giving herself the space to create work that was personally and emotionally motivated. "A couple of years after my mother died I made a record which was definitely hanging out in the kind of improvised free jazz land but it was also in a way a pop record and most of the material was versions of other songs by artists like Suicide and Iggy Pop." For her, working with established material was freeing. "We were harnessed by the fact that they had these sorts of forms and something happened, like I remembered how to be myself again, in another dimension and that catapulted me into what I've been continuing with for the last





This page: Rick Owens coat & dress, Shaun Leane bracelet, stylist's own tie  
Opposite page: Andreas Kronthaler for Vivienne Westwood jacket, Van Cleef & Arpels ring





10 years." For her, inspiration is something she has to be open to. "I don't own it, but for me it's such a big part of the magic, but I'm also a strong believer in that you have to work for it to deserve it."

She's also passionate about moving her work forward. "I think I'm kind of allergic to over-repeating. I think there are certain things in your process in life that you have to repeat, but I'm also allergic to relying on repetition and therefore not pushing the boat out or experimenting or just leaving yourself open to the elements." For her, so much of the good creative work comes from showing up and doing the work. "I think that happens a lot when I'm performing, whether it's on stage or in a studio singing, and maybe I do a take of singing something in a certain way and I'll think as I come through it, 'Oh shit. That actually sounded okay. Let's do another take.'"

When speaking of her work today, it's from a place of gratitude and observance. "I don't wanna be over-reflective, but I have a few things under my belt, so I can also appreciate how important certain things have been in my life. That time where I was a part of The Slits family, but I also became a part of the band, that was so wonderful and there was a huge lesson in all of these things, you know, it's a trip."

Her next trip has been creating *Versions* and it's one of her creative examples of collaboration. She also truly loves and celebrates other female artists. "We keep each other alive. Women have always been my biggest influences, and these artists, like Robyn, Greentea Peng and Kelsey Lu, you know, they're my sisters." She describes how this project has nourished her. "They feed

me, you know, their spirits, what they're seeing and what they're making and feeling really touches me. I feel a connection and it's a very important, powerful exchange of faith. Because I feel sometimes I hear somebody's song and I'm like, 'Thank fuck, you just almost saved my life.'"

For Neneh, that's the real gift of this work. "That's what inspiration is and that is what we can give to each other". She likens it to Paul Newman's character, Brick, in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* who says, "He drinks to get the click in his head." For her, these relationships provide her inspiration and spark. "I think it's been such a gorgeous experience to just sit around and think of all the most glorious women around doing great things and to ask them if they would take part in this funny little project and nearly everyone finding that they had the time and wanted to, and now it's an actual body of work."

We speak about the recent changes in the entertainment industry for women following 'Me Too' and she's refreshingly blunt. "I guess it's a work in progress? I mean, it's fucked, isn't it? We're talking about celebrating womanhood and we know that there are so many amazing women doing amazing things, but women are still over-sexualised in the wrong way in too many ways, in too many places, in too many things."

Within this though, there's space for celebration but also work to be done, "We can't take our eyes off the button and sometimes I find it triggering and exhausting. But I also think that what we are all learning from what's been happening in the world, particularly over the last, you know, five plus years is that we

have to listen and we have to pay attention. We have to be aware of all of the many layers of injustice and inequalities and racism. We have to rise above these kinds of trenches. Sometimes I feel like people just wanna scream about things and be angry. And I think that yes, we have that there, we have to fight for shit, but we have to love one another through it and I don't wanna sound like fucking depressing, but we've got a long way to go."

For her, the answer lies in protecting ourselves. "You have to protect your shit because if you don't keep it safe, hold your head high and keep your shit together and don't let 'em change you, keep your moon shine strong." Some of her strength comes from leaning into her femininity. "Being a woman is absolutely beautiful, but it's incredibly complicated, because of the world that we live in and the way that we see ourselves and the things that we struggle with," she says.

The evolution of this sense of womanhood has been the ability to see the world through the eyes of her children. "My children who are now fully formed, amazing women, we have deep exchanges and the relationships that I have with them are also based on deep friendship and it's very powerful." In this way, her kids fuel her optimism. "My mum used to say about me and my brother that it's the best work she ever did and I have to admit that I copy that." I ask what advice she gives her kids when they're having a tough day and she's simple and to the point. "I mean, it sounds fucking wack, but trust your instinct. Listen to yourself. Don't fucking give up and if you're having a really shit day, tell someone and know that it's gonna get better."



Bottega Veneta dress & boots





This page: Stanly Bryan top, Tiffany & Co necklace & earrings  
Opposite page: Rick Owens coat & dress, Shaun Leane bracelet & earrings, stylist's own tie

Makeup: Bari Khalique using CHANEL Les 4 Ombres Tweed & CHANEL Le Lift Pro  
Hair: Ryuta Saiga  
Photographer's assistant: Heather Lawrence  
Stylist's assistants: Talulah Lily & Isabelle Eyres  
Special thanks: Bayeux Ltd

