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Soko the Cat

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Stéphanie Sokolinski has always walked her own path. From her musical debut with the spare and honest *I Will Never Love You More* to her recent acting work and zine of Instagram sexts; she's truly individual, uncompromising and interesting. That's why we jumped at a chance to interview this self-confessed cat lover and creative chameleon.





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Our interview request for Soko is met with one caveat... "Yes, but she wants to shoot with tons of kittens". Never one to shy from a challenge, several calls later, and we have secured a clowder of Persian kittens for the photos. Soko's excitement is palpable, and her responses are peppered with "It was the best Sunday I have ever dreamed of. That's the kind of morning that is worth waking up for." You only have to view her Instagram for evidence of this, where she placed them in a cup and pretended to drink them: "Imagine all those kittens wriggling inside you, that would surely give you eternal life!"

It's this knack for building a world around her which makes Soko so enthralling as an artist, as she puts it, "My first love would be telling stories, whatever shape or form." She had never thought she was a singer or a musician. "I started playing the piano at four, and acting at four too, so I really started both at the same time. I also started judo and swimming, and horse riding and all this shit, because my mum wanted to keep me busy and not really focused on my Dad's death too much. Which means that now I'm very versatile. I can basically learn anything really quick."

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Most recently, this has been useful in her role in *The Dancer* where she had to perform a stunt on horseback, surprising even herself with forgotten skills. You'd think this might have been her biggest obstacle, but playing renowned dancer Loic Fuller presented a new set of challenges, most notably the choreography and costume. All her dances were in "this crazy dress with tonnes of light projected on it; it's gorgeous. It's the hardest thing that I've ever had to learn in my life because it's so physical. My whole back is miserable."

It doesn't seem like Soko is someone to be easily deterred in any way and in this the parallels with Fuller are notable. Indeed, Soko was drawn to her because "she's just the most avant-garde, fearless woman ever. She was one of the first women wondering about copyright, because she invented that thing. She was like, 'well, I don't even own my own dance', and they were like, 'well, it's not like a technical invention or anything like that', and she was like, 'but it is! It's very precise'. She was fighting to get her dance recognised and copyrighted."

Loic's entrepreneurial spirit runs through this film in more than name though, with Soko involved in the development for the past seven years. Spotted on the set of *In the Beginning* by Stephanie Di Gusto who felt Soko deserved a more prominent role, she wrote the film with her in mind.

The other star of the film is Johnny Depp's Daughter, Lily Rose, but it's thanks to Soko she was cast for this. The actress set to play Isadora Duncan dropped from the film and as Soko and Lily are friends, she thought she'd be perfect. "We had to fly to LA and do a reading with her and she was such a natural. She's incredible, she acts the part. She's playing Isadora Duncan, she is just killing it."

In terms of parallels between herself and Loic, Soko is candid, relating to Loic's forceful character and convictions, "She can't do anything, but be an artist". She also highlights how Loic uses her legendary creative spirit to combat her insecurities, "Loic has a problem with thinking that she's ugly, and that nobody can see her, that's why she hides behind her dress. So I have definitely suffered from that, not thinking that you're the stereotypical kind of beauty. But so what? You're still making art."

It's this kind of wisdom and confidence which makes Soko so intriguing and powerful as an artist, but also the fact that she never seems to take herself too seriously.

Her Instagram name is @sokothecat which, she explains, comes as part of a family nickname based on her surname Sokolinski: "All of his life, my dad was called Mr Soko; my grandmother was called Mamie Soko. My childhood friends would always call me and my brother 'the Sokos'. It was my nickname for so long that, at some point it just became weird to introduce myself as something else". The Instagram thing evolved when her

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chosen name was taken, but as she explains, "It suits me because I am a cat, I'm very independent, and all I want is to cuddle and eat good food and hang out by the fire, be warm and cosy and being pet." Even her record label is called *Baby Cat* for this reason.

Despite this love of comfort, Soko is a frequent traveller, based in LA but regularly in Paris, New York and countless cities across the globe. She copes with travel by packing vitamins, protein shakes and trying to sleep as much as possible whilst travelling. It's clear where her roots are now though, describing LA as "totally home. Forever. There is no going back, it's just the best place to live." Where the balance of nature and city suits her perfectly, "I love that the city offers ways to create, collaborate and make money as an artist, whilst still being so close to nature." Another draw for her in LA is the music scene, which she describes as "just the best". Among her favourite labels are *Orange County's Burger Records* who she's also put out a cassette with. She cites the ease of collaborating with people plus the fact that "there are always amazing shows happening, or people from huge bands DJ-ing, which means there's always cool stuff happening."

A self-confessed music nerd, her current playlist includes *Deerhunter*, *Kurt Vile*, *Beach House*, but also *The*

Cure and *The Smiths*. Her love of British bands springs from hearing 'Boys Don't Cry' and becoming "the biggest *Cure* fan" with 'Three Imaginary Boys' still a treasured album. From there, she discovered *Joy Division*, *New Order* and *Depeche Mode* and a love affair with British music began.

All these bands are united by the grandeur and complexity of their sound and the richness of emotion they evoke, so it's unsurprising they should resonate with an artist like Soko. Her intensity and creative bravery are surely the things that make her stand out. As she says, "You can't get nervous. Just start doing things and then the whole train of creativity is just going to follow. Once you have a step in it, you're going to make a lot of shit things, but then you're going to be cool and take your own medicine and be like, 'This is cool, I can do more things like this'. Then that's just going to snowball into whatever you want to be making."

With this wisdom in mind, we asked her if she had any other advice for aspiring creatives and she didn't disappoint: "You need to not wonder too much about where it's heading or what the goal is. If the goal is being famous and making money, then you've got it all wrong. If the goal is having fun and doing something you love, that's the goal. If it turns into something else, then it's even fucking cooler."

