

MAGAZINE

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LISTINGS**

MOVE OVER BEYONCÉ!

What chance, asks Lyra (aka Bandon's Queen Bey) that both she and the woman she shares fake hair with should bring out albums at the same time

I was like “Beyoncé, would you calm down for a second? Give us a chance — just give us one bloody chance!” Cork singer Lyra is recalling her reaction to the news that Beyoncé’s eighth solo album would come out just a couple of weeks before her own — itself toiled over for years and held until the moment was just right.

Lyra’s self-titled debut, out since Friday, now has competition for the top spot in the Irish album charts from one of the most formidable pop acts of all time in Queen Bey — someone she is frequently compared to.

‘It’s gas, because people are like “the Beyoncé with the Cork accent” and I’m like, “Well, now she’s brought out an album at the same time... great,”’ Lyra jokes to *Magazine*. ‘I know Beyoncé and me share fake hair, but that’s about it.’

The slightly unfortunate timing may have helped the ‘Bandon Beyoncé’ (as recently coined by the 2 Johnnies) recognise what really matters with the release of her first album.

‘I have to enjoy it if [getting to number one] happens, and not beat myself up if it doesn’t,’ she says.

‘The most important thing with this album is people getting to know me even more as an artist. I’m in it for the long road and if it takes me a bit longer... I’m well used to dancing in thigh-high boots, I’m sure I can walk in them too.’

It is hard to believe Lyra’s first album is only coming out now. She came to prominence with her debut EP *W.I.L.D.* all of eight years ago and has kept a mainstream presence ever since, releasing singles that have a habit of ending up in major TV shows like *Grey’s Anatomy* and *Love Island* and playing festivals like Electric Picnic, the Isle of Wight Festival and Lollapalooza Berlin.

She admits the record ‘could have come out sooner’ but was determined to reconnect with her audience first, after the enforced two-year hiatus of the pandemic on top of a year taken out to care for her nan. The latest part of that mission to reconnect was a 22-date tour of Ireland over the last couple of months that brought her to Donegal, Waterford and everywhere in between, including two shows at Dublin’s 3Olympia.

‘It’s very much a lonely road when you’re a solo artist, especially when you write a lot of your own music, and I write a lot at home,’ Lyra says. ‘So being able to have an intimate connection with people who have followed me — some of them for years — or who’ve just started following me is really important for me at these early stages.’

Though she feels like she has been on the scene ‘since God was a boy’, the 30-year-old regards the album launch as the real start of her career. Things are now done on her terms after years of dubious input from industry voices that, at its worst, led to her developing an eating disorder.

ME ON LOVE ISLAND? THIS IS WHAT A REAL BODY LOOKS LIKE

Cork-born singer Lyra was once told to lose weight to make it in the music industry, but now she’s ready to take on the might of Beyoncé



‘I feel like at these early points it’s very important for me to be able to nearly look everyone in the audience in the eye and let

them know that I’m so grateful to them for turning up for me,’ she says. ‘Jaysus, you’d have some job at the 3Arena [where Lyra

has supported Westlife] trying to look everyone in the eyeballs — you’d have to go to Specsavers afterwards.’

That 22-date tour meant 22 separate, extravagant costumes, each born in the imagination of the performer and often with a less glamorous backstory.

‘There were some custom-made outfits that I got done, but also some stuff that I bought on eBay, Depop — other people’s dresses,’ she explains. ‘Like, I got one that cost me €8.99 and brought it into an alteration shop and they made it into a leotard and added puff sleeves and stuff.’

‘So the outfits definitely vary from cheap as chips, where I’m literally glueing diamantés on it on my mom’s kitchen table, to getting a custom made outfit.’

Family comes up a lot chatting to Lyra, who speaks to *Magazine* from the ‘more bougie than normal’ surroundings of the K-Club in Co. Kildare — her bridal suite stay a gift from management, who are fans.

Her parents, amicably separated for years, took turns to chaperone her around on her national tour, while her older sister calls before every show. ‘I got to spend some really quality time with them that I don’t normally get, because I’m normally away, so even that is worth its weight in gold,’ she reflects.

Lyra — Laura McNamara on



Lyra, dubbed the 'Bandon Beyoncé' by the 2Jonnies, has finally released her self-titled debut album

BULIMIA WAS AN ADDICTIVE, LONELY ROAD

Lyra still gets 'choked up' discussing her struggles with self-image and bulimia, brought on by industry people telling her she would have to lose weight to be successful as a pop star.

'It's such a sad thing to think that there are people going through that, and I just wish to God I could sit down with all of them and help,' she tells *Magazine*.

'It's such a lonely road and it's such an addictive road and it's something you're doing to yourself but you can't stop.'

The singer was blindsided when asked by an interviewer how she had lost weight and

revealed that her mother and sister had helped her overcome a phase of making herself sick after meals — which she hadn't even acknowledged as bulimia at the time.

Lyra 'couldn't stop crying' the next day and considered asking for the admission to be removed from the interview, partly for fear of 'letting down' her father and some friends who didn't know the full truth.

But 'somebody close' to her was going through the same thing and she decided that speaking out might help other people.

'People say I look like this empowered, self-confident

woman on stage, so maybe if you found out I went through that it would help them be like, "Look at Lyra — she's not skin and bone anymore and she's so happy, she's so confident."

'And when it did come out, my DMs were full of messages from mums, dads, thanking me for speaking about it — that their daughters and some of their sons had actually started to talk to them about it and that they didn't know. There were girls saying that they were too scared to talk to their family about it and [asking] how do they get over that, and I found it so rewarding to be able to help.'

her passport — has lived in the UK for almost a decade, mostly in Hove after giving up on London.

She is a regular sea swimmer there, especially after touring — 'that's one way to freeze your eggs' — and loves the town, but admitted she is 'back and forth [to Ireland] like there's no tomorrow'.

And she has been in a relationship across the water for 'around three years' with a former professional rugby player whose name she has kept to herself, though an ex of hers provides the subject matter for much of her new album. 'I kind of feel like I'm almost reliving my breakup [performing the new album] so I don't want to then be splashing a new relationship all over the place,' she reasons. 'And I think he would absolutely hate this whole public eye thing [even though] he was in the public eye when he played professional rugby. And I don't want him to be called "Lyra's boyfriend".'

The Bandon native's obvious vocal and songwriting talents saw her getting invited over to Swedish pop maestro Max Martin's studio in LA, where she spent three days developing ideas with esteemed producers Rami Yacoub, Burns and BloodPop — the trio fresh from producing Lady GaGa's 2020 album *Chromatica*.

Lyra says she was 'very nervous' during the 'surreal' sessions, as the producers discussed GaGa's duets with Elton John and Ariana Grande on the not-yet-released album.

'I just felt like "I do not belong in this room," and I suppose I clammed up a bit because it was almost like I was forcing it too much,' she admits. 'I

was way overthinking it and I just wasn't being myself because I was like, "Oh my God, I need to prove that I am better than I am because they're talking about Lady Gaga and Ariana Grande and I'm Lyra from a village in Cork."'

However, she has kept in touch with Yacoub about collaborating and the LA sessions yielded the opening track of her album, *America*, produced by Burns.

And she says the studio wizards 'kind of got to know me on the third day — we just kind of relaxed and sat around and talked about music and I showed them who I really was myself as a person. I think that's why we now have contact and communication.'

Lyra can't explain why her songs are so often picked up by TV shows and advertisements (her track *The Magic of Christmas* was used in consecutive festive An Post ads), but offers that her 'choruses are quite big'.

'*Emerald* got synched a lot. It has an ethereal feel to it and it has a lot going on — it

has the bigness and it has the quietness. And I suppose a lot of my music has a lot of emotional attachment, so it tells a story that maybe they're looking for at that time to heighten that scene, I suppose. I find it weird when they pick my song, like why would they pick mine? When I got *Grey's Anatomy* I'm like, "Why did they pick *Falling*? Of all the songs in the world, they picked mine." I was thrilled about it because *Grey's Anatomy* is known for having a great track record for music.'

Love Island has played her tracks '15 million times'. 'My friends are like "Are they trying to get you into the island?"'

'Imagine me in *Love Island*. I'd be starving, because they don't do any eating on the thing. I just don't think I could do it. I'd have the cellulite out all over the place. They'd be like, "Oh my God, here's yer one." I'd be like "Well, this is what a real body looks like."'

— Colm McGuirk

■ Lyra's debut album *Lyra* is available now on gold vinyl, CD and to stream.

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