

# FENNE LILY

## BIOGRAPHY 2018

Not many young artists can count up a massive 20 million+ Spotify streams off the back of the first song they've ever written, but then again, not many young artists are Fenne Lily. Raised in the wilds of rural Dorset to punk and Queen-loving parents, the 20-year-old talent first picked up the guitar aged 15, and quickly found she was a natural. "Growing up in the countryside was amazing," she explains. "I had so much space, and loads of time with no distractions – that's why I learnt an instrument, because I didn't have anything else to do!"

Just one year later and she'd written the delicate but powerful 'Top To Toe', which deftly tackled social anxiety over softly picked guitar; a song about bleak adolescence that almost everyone could relate to. Self-released, it saw the young unknown attract global attention for her sublime songwriting ability and sharp emotional intelligence, as well as her gifted way with melody. British fashion house Burberry came knocking on her door and asked her perform for them in Paris, thanks to the song's subtle channeling of Laura Marling, as well as the swooning sound of Angel Olsen, Sharon Van Etten and underground 1960s psychedelic greats like Linda Perhacs.

Fenne's sound was elegant, addictive and blowing up the hype machine. Now, though, she's gearing up to release her debut album and proving she's much more than your typical acoustic songwriter. So if you're after a record full of soft, sweetly packaged ballads, then you've come to the wrong place. "I don't want to be a folk singer, even though that's what comes easy to me," she states. "I don't want to disappoint the people who liked 'Top To Toe', but I don't want to become pigeonholed."

Instead, Fenne's ploughing a tougher path, joining forces with Isle of Wight band Champs, who offer up the crisp, crunchy backing of a full band while her lush vocals and stark lyricism takes centre stage. Although she sings about heartbreak, she's quick to state that her songs aren't about wallowing in misery. "My music comes from anger, but I can't sing angrily, so I sing sadly. It's a sadness that's fueled by fury." This is Fenne all over. She's straight up and to the point. As she puts it herself, there's "no fanning about" when it comes to her music and that's what makes it all the more special.

Though Fenne had been gigging in Bristol since she was 15, with her dad driving her up for shows two or three times a month, she finally moved to the city when she was 18, embarking on an art foundation course and discovering a love of photography – she

shoots all her own artwork, inspired by the candid work of Wolfgang Tillmans – during her studies. Upon arrival in the city, Fenne flung herself into the local music scene and joined forces with Chiverin; the growing music community founded by her now-manager. “All my friends are doing super trendy techno music or are in badass bands,” says Fenne, which goes some of the way to explaining the enticing evolution of her sound, setting her apart from the mainstream indie and folk worlds.

Hers is a sound all of her very own, with stream-of-consciousness vocals directly tapping into raw emotion and careful, considered songwriting. So considered, in fact, that most of Fenne’s musical output to date has ended up on the album. “I’m not prolific at all,” she explains. “I’ve probably only written 20 songs in my whole life. I wait for the perfect time, when I literally can’t not talk about something anymore. I’m not very good at speaking about my feelings but eventually I have to write a song.”

Written in sporadic bursts, the tracks were predominantly recorded in Bristol and on the Isle of Wight with producers Tamu Massif and James Thorpe, while ‘Brother’ was recorded with and produced by PJ Harvey collaborator John Parish. Most of the album digs into the break-up of her first important relationship and the pain that followed. The moody ‘Three Oh Nine’ – named after the date her lover left – is an anthem of acceptance and resignation that somehow manages to encompass both Lana Del Rey’s soaring majesty and Marika Hackman’s grunge-pop sass. “It was written the morning after he told me he was leaving and that we had three months to try and still be in love, but I’d already started grieving,” says Fenne of the emotive highlight in a record of many. ‘On Hold’ meanwhile makes for one of the album’s “two positive songs”, an upbeat, Mac DeMarco inspired tribute to her best friend Felix, who she met immediately after the break-up. “He was also really sad. So we were just sad together and He made me feel like it was OK to feel like that.”

‘More Than You Know’ – the second song Fenne ever wrote after ‘Top To Toe’ – was born from an obsession with the guitar sound on Bon Iver’s seminal ‘For Emma, Forever Ago’ and was recorded in three takes, making for one of the more organic, minimal recordings on the album. The crashing, Kate Bush-worthy ‘The Hand You Deal’ is, Fenne admits, the most harrowing song here. A haunting epic, it sees her accepting her fate, with layered vocals crooning: “I don’t try to wake/There’s nothing in my day that I want to replay”. “I was just in so much pain,” she says of her state of mind while she was writing the song. Catharsis, though, is there in ‘Carpark’, the last track recorded for the album, and a song which offers a glimmer of hope within the bleakness. “I wrote it really angry at this guy and it marked the end of my choices towards men – I’ve made this decision for the last time!” she states.

Fenne’s sadness however, is UK music’s gain. She isn’t just one to watch for 2018, she’s one you won’t be able to keep your eyes off for a second.