

COVER / STAR

California dreaming

‘Not all my romantic relationships were bad, but some of them challenged me in a way I didn’t want. I’m happy I don’t have to do that now’ **Lana Del Rey**

Interview **Lotte Jeffs** Photography **Thomas Whiteside** Styling **Alison Edmond**

DOES LANA DEL REY LIVE RIGHT INSIDE THE MIDDLE OF THE ‘H’ OF THE HOLLYWOOD SIGN, and spend most of her nights perched high above the chaos that swirls within the city of angels below, as the teaser for her new album, *Lust For Life*, suggests?

Or does she rent a house in LA’s Santa Monica or Silver Lake or someplace else she’s not about to divulge, in case, having taken a cryptic February tweet of hers literally, a posse of her 6.3 million well-meaning Twitter followers show up on her doorstep with the ‘magic ingredients’ to cast spells on President Trump?

Does she really only dip her toes into ‘the muck and the mires of the city every now and then’, as she says in the album’s trailer? Or does she ‘go out quite a lot actually’, as she tells me when we meet, and spend her nights having fun with a tight crew of mainly musician mates, dancing at house parties, going to gigs and occasionally wrestling the microphone from her male friends to sing *Hotel California* in karaoke bars? In this post-truth world, it feels pedantic to care too much either way.

The ‘real’ Lana Del Rey is a 31-year-old woman called Elizabeth Woolridge Grant, born in Lake Placid, New York. She’s close to her younger sister – Chuck, a photographer – but less so to her parents, Patricia and Robert, and her little brother, Charlie. They’re a family of individualists, she tells me: ‘It was natural that we all went down our own separate paths, and we’ve all stayed there.’

We are sitting next to each other on a sofa in the Los Angeles recording studio where she has been creating her most musically accomplished work yet – the aforementioned album, *Lust For Life*, is destined to be the sound of this summer. Lana is fully present, smart, funny, engaging and refreshingly able to laugh at herself. She wears jeans and a

SEQUIN DRESS,
MARC JACOBS. GOLD
EARRINGS, RODARTE.
GOLD RING (JUST SEEN),
ELIZABETH AND JAMES



THIS PAGE
PINK AND SILVER
SEQUIN DRESS, PREEN
BY THORNTON BREGAZZI
OPPOSITE
FEATHER COAT, ADAM
LIPPES, SILK-MIX
SLIP DRESS, INTIMISSIMI.
SILK-MIX BRA AND
SILK-MIX BRIEFS,
STYLIST'S OWN. PEARL
EARRINGS, DIOR

THIS PAGE
BLACK LEATHER
JACKET, AND BLACK
AND WHITE DRESS,
BOTH COACH
OPPOSITE
LEATHER COAT,
RODARTE



vintage shirt, and she talks softly but with a compelling certainty. I like her all the more for the fact that no amount of everyday-ness negates the magic she exudes as a performer. To her fans, Lana exists in flickering Super 8; the Manic Pixie Dream Girl who comes with no baggage or bad days, but is here only for you in a Valencia-filtered fantasy. She's an idea of a woman who didn't grow up anywhere, but emerged fully formed from the elevator at the Chateau Marmont Hotel. She's a montage of Americana, finished with a flick of black eyeliner.

BOTH THE REALITY and the fantasy of Lana Del Rey make up a fully formed, albeit exceptional, human being. But, as Lana tells me, inhabiting these two worlds hasn't always been easy: 'I know that if I had more of a persona then [when she released her breakthrough hit, *Video Games*, on the internet in 2011], I have less of one now. I think it comes down to getting a little older. Maybe I needed a stronger look or something to lean on [back then]. But it wouldn't really be hard for me today to play a mega-show in jeans without rehearsing and still feel like I was coming from the right place.'

I suggest that the scrutiny Lana was put under by the media for having a melancholic persona was unfair. Everyone, to some degree, presents a different side of themselves at work, right? Plus, she's hardly the first artist to change her name or cultivate a distinctive stage look. Yet, countless conspiracy theories called into question her appearance, talent and family background around the time her second album, *Born To Die*, was released in 2012 – but Lana is remarkably understanding.

'Looking back now, I get a little more of what [the critics] were saying. When I was in the mix of a lot of reviews and critiques, I was kind of like, "What? I do my hair and my make-up just like everyone else for my

pictures and my show, and yes my songs are melancholic, but so are whoever else's." So to see a couple of other female artists not get criticised made me think, "What is it about me?"'

In hindsight, she says, she understands what the criticism and intrigue over her authenticity as an artist was about: 'I think it comes down to energy, I really do. I wasn't overtly saying, "I'm unhappy" or "I'm struggling" in my music, but I think maybe people did catch that and they were saying, "If you're going to put music like that out there, you better fess up to it." But I don't think I really knew how I felt. Then when things got a little bigger with the music, I was still figuring out what was important to me.'

I get the sense that she's done a lot of figuring out in the past few years, like many of us now in our early thirties probably have done, too. The difference with Lana, of course, is that all her experimentation, mistakes and regrets were fodder for public consumption. I mention that sinking feeling I get when I stumble across an old diary or a Facebook post that feels like it was from a totally different place to where I am now. I ask if she can relate.

'That applies to me,' she says. 'I have cringy moments. Certain things I have said and songs I have done, but mostly the ones that were leaked... I mean, they're not my finest.'

She's talking about her computer being hacked in 2010, when hundreds of unfinished songs were released online, without her permission. It was a horrible invasion of her privacy, and it leads us on to a discussion about vulnerability – though interestingly, it's not a word she says she has ever applied to herself.

I ask her what performing on stage takes from her emotionally and what she gains from it; her amphitheatre shows usually hold up to 24,000 people at capacity. She fixes me with a not-at-all vulnerable look and says, 'Well, it depends on the day. If I'm having a good day, it still takes a lot, but so much of it is physical. I try to take strength and sing from my core, so I have to actually feel good and get a lot of sleep. Of course, it also helps if my personal life is even; when you're on stage for an hour and 40 minutes, you think while you're singing. I don't like my in-between thoughts to be restless, or worrisome, so I can focus on the crowd.'

AFTER A SHOW, SHE FEELS REFLECTIVE and needs time to process it. 'It's not like you do it and it didn't happen; it's a real experience. I know rock bands who say they fucking love it – that they would [perform] every night and wouldn't do anything else. I don't know if it's as emotional an experience for them [as it is for me].'

Back to that need to feel good and have an 'even' personal life. Lana has lived in both New York and London, but says Los Angeles is starting to feel like home, and that's a big part of what's making >

SEQUIN DRESS,
VERSACE. GOLD
RING (JUST SEEN),
ELIZABETH AND JAMES

PINK CHIFFON TOP,
PRADA. SILVER
EARRINGS, SWAROVSKI.
LANA'S RING FINGER:
SILVER RING, SWAROVSKI.
LANA'S MIDDLE FINGER:
18CT WHITE GOLD
RING, BVLGARI



her happy right now: 'I'm growing my roots and meeting a lot of other friends, so I feel a little more settled.' In her downtime, she loves swimming in the ocean: 'I have a friend called Ron who likes to swim with me. So every now and then, we find an empty beach, jump in and swim the length of the coast, from one side of the cove to the other.'

HER FRIENDS ARE HER FAMILY, says Lana, and that's why she can't accept anything less than total honesty and trust from them: 'The fact that I know that now makes everything a lot clearer. What's interesting is how unsafe we [could] feel among each other [if we weren't] able to express how we really feel. It's hard knowing that if you tell someone exactly how you feel, like if you're happy or unhappy, that could be the end of the relationship because they don't feel the same way.'

We speak about the crews you pick up through your life and agree that, in your thirties, you are much better at surrounding yourself with people who make you feel good. 'When you're in your twenties, you let this cast of characters [into your life], especially if you're in the arts,' she says. 'It didn't matter what they stood for or what they thought was important. But as the years went on, there were things that I saw in people that I didn't like.'

Lana is enjoying being part of a music scene in LA where her friends include photographer Emma Tillman (also the wife of singer-songwriter Father John Misty), Zach Dawes, who has played bass with the British super-group The Last Shadow Puppets, and musicians Jonathan Wilson and Cam Avery. They play music together, which is not something she's done with friends before. The first time she had dinner with the whole gang, she thought: 'Wow, this is great.' She tells me: 'Feeling part of

something is definitely a nice feeling.' The downside to rolling with a crew of fellow musicians is that karaoke becomes a competitive sport: 'If I am with guys, they're always on the microphone and sometimes it's hard to grab it from them. Everyone pretends that it doesn't matter, but you can tell there are moments in the choruses when people are really singing.'

We laugh and I feel pleased that I'm meeting Lana at a time in her life when, as she puts it: 'All the tough things that I have been through – that I've drawn upon [in my work] – don't exist for me any more. Not all my romantic relationships were bad, but some of them challenged me in a way that I didn't want to be challenged, and I am happy I don't have to do that now.'

I don't mean to rain on her parade, but I ask whether she feels that when she admits she's happy that something bad might be just around the corner? 'Yes, sometimes. I have a little bit of that. I feel that it's a human thing to be superstitious. Sometimes I say to my friends, "I don't want to jinx it." Or if I'm on the phone I'm like, "I'm so excited about this", and then I'm waiting for that phone call the next day... but there's no such thing as jinxing it. Just let go.'

The key to happiness, she says, is to ask yourself what will make you happy: 'I try not to do anything that won't [make me happy], even if it's a show in a place that doesn't suit me. It's so simple; I always used to ask myself that, but I never listened [to the answer] because I knew I was probably going to do it anyway. If someone really needed me to do something, I would probably be like, "OK!"'

I wonder if we put too much emphasis on being happy and that in itself causes stress and anxiety, but Lana passionately disagrees: 'No! I think happiness is the ultimate life goal. I think it's the only thing that's important. There are no mechanisms in place for routes to happiness, that's the whole fucking problem. I think people are unhappy in school – the education structure has been the same for a long time and kids are still not satisfied all over the world with their educational experience. And you don't have enough conversations when you're young about what makes for a satisfying, mutual relationship. Those collective life experiences – your youth, your academic education and your education about business, marriage or relationship goals – they all lead up to your collective happiness. I think the emphasis is on the wrong things, and it has been for a long time.'

LANA TELLS ME SHE'S MORE SOCIALLY ENGAGED than ever; her fifth and latest album is a mix of personal introspection and outward-looking anthems, such as *God Bless America*, in which she sings: 'God bless America and all the beautiful women in it.' She says that, with this record, she was striving for a feeling that >

we're all in this together: 'I think it would be weird to be making a record during the past 18 months and not comment on how [the political landscape] was making me or the people I know feel, which is not good. It would be really difficult if my views didn't line up with a lot of what people were saying.'

We discuss being constantly bombard-ed with news and other people's views in our hyper-connected world, and I ask how she reconciles her personal wellbeing with the collective feeling that we are all going to hell in a handcart.

'I THINK IT'S A BALANCE, I REALLY DO.

You are so fortunate if you have good health and high energy because it takes a lot to be a responsible human. Responsible to yourself, responsible to others, and to know when not to get too deep into the wormhole of news, but still be politically in-the-know, and not be disconnected. In my life, it's like walking on a tightrope. I read the news, but I won't read it before bed; I won't read it when I get up and I won't read it between my recording sessions. I have windows of time where I check in and catch up with everyone, but I keep my sacred things sacred.'

And as for her paean to America's women? 'I wrote *God Bless America* before the Women's Marches sprung up, but I could tell they were going to happen. As soon as the election was over, I knew that was going to happen. People were way more vocal and way more active on social media and in real life, so I realised a lot of women were saying out loud that they needed support and they were nervous about some of the bills that might get passed that would directly affect them. So yes, it's a direct response in anticipation of what I thought would happen, and what did happen.'

Predicting the Women's Marches must have taken a seriously smart social instinct, or some kind of sorcery straight from one

of her otherworldly *Lust For Life* trailers. Whatever you think, you can't deny that the pulse of the zeitgeist beats throughout Lana's new album, from her pop collaboration with The Weeknd on the title track to the moody duet with John Lennon's son, Sean, and my personal favourite, *Yosemite*, a beautiful song about the way relationships change over time.

After she plays me this track in the very room in which it was recorded, I can't help but ask what Lana is like as a girlfriend. 'I'm amazing. I'm the best,' she jokes, before clarifying, 'I actually am the best girlfriend because I only get into a relationship if I'm really excited about it. I'm unconditionally understanding, very loving and I like to be with that person for a lot of the time.' After hearing *Yosemite*'s refrain that she's no longer 'a candle in the wind', which I take to mean she's found a steadier light in her life, I wonder whether what she looks for in a relationship has also changed? 'For me, the dream is to have a little bit of the edge, the sexiness, the magnetism, the camaraderie, be on the same page and all that stuff, but without the fallout that comes from a person who is really selfish and puts only their needs first, which is like a lot of frontmen if we're talking about musicians!' (Lana has previously dated Barrie-James O'Neill, the Scottish lead singer of alt-rock band Cassidy.) 'I'm going to write a book one day called, "The curse of the frontman and why you should always date the bassist."'

LANA SMILES, TAKES A SIP OF HER ICED COFFEE, and says:

'I guess I have a little bit of a fantasy that really great relationships, friendships and romances can stand the test of time. Even though each person in the relationship or the group changes, they don't change in ways that would make the relationship come to an end. The chorus [of *Yosemite*] is about doing things for fun, for free and doing them for the right reasons. It's about having artistic integrity; not doing things because you think they would be big, but because the message is something that's important. And then, it's about just being with someone because you really can't see not having them in your life, not because it would be "beneficial" to you to be in their company. It's that concept of just being in a relationship for 100% the right reasons. Being a good person, basically.'

Lana Del Rey is mercurial – just when you think you've got her, she slips through your fingers like quicksilver – but in that hot second, I think I see her clearly: an artist who is rising from the ambiguity of youth and emerging into a woman with an authentic vision for her life and her art. Yes, that might one day fade like the barely there 'Chateau Marmont' tattoo on her left wrist, but right now her power is in sharp, unfiltered focus. ■

*Lana Del Rey's fifth studio album, *Lust For Life*, is out soon*

GREEN CREPE BLAZER WITH BELT, AND GREEN CREPE TROUSERS, BOTH HAIDER ACKERMANN. BLACK LEATHER SHOES, CHRISTIAN LOUBOUTIN. 18CT GOLD EARRINGS (JUST SEEN), TIFFANY & CO. HAIR: ANNA COFONE AT THE WALL GROUP USING ORIBE. MAKE-UP: PAMELA COCHRANE AT BRIDGE USING YVES SAINT LAURENT BEAUTY. MANICURE: LISA PEÑA-WONG AT OPUS BEAUTY. LOCAL PRODUCTION BY GLAM PR (GLAMPR.COM)