Lily Lyons - 'Reopen The World' bio

For Lily Lyons, music feels like hope - or perhaps, possibility. Growing up split between London and Somerset, making weekly eight hour drives across the country between the base she knew with her mother and the faraway town her father had left for, she remembers the comfort of the car stereo on the open road. As she grew older, struggling to fully realise herself in the world and to pick apart the often knotty and complicated relationships that had formed around her, music was the thing that offered a window to an alternative.

“There was so much wisdom in the music I was listening to - Simon and Garfunkel, Nick Drake and Joni Mitchell - the tenderness in it was so moving to me when I was 14,” she recalls. “There was this soft world that was so compelling to me, and it introduced me to a soft version of myself that wasn’t as welcomed in my actual life. It showed me that you can be all different things at once and that’s what my music has become - happy but with scathing lyrics, or really sad sounds with a joyful message. The tension of those opposites is really interesting to me.”

And so, when Lily decided on a gut feeling to sign up to music college despite having never written a note, it might have seemed insane to everyone else aside from her mum (“In the past she had kept herself smaller and she liked the idea of me being big,” she smiles). But, to Lyons, it made complete sense. Ensconced in the coastal town of Falmouth with little else to do *but* pour all her time and efforts into learning her craft, she immediately thrived.

Influenced by those tender auteurs of her childhood, plus their modern counterparts like Big Thief, Nick Hakim and Kansas singer Krystle Warren, by the end of her first year Lily had gathered enough confidence to perform her own composition at the college’s showcase for Island Records. The label’s then-president Darcus Beese - the man responsible for signing Amy Winehouse, Florence and the Machine and more - took a shine to her. It was Lily’s first ever gig.

“He was like, ‘You’re fucking great!’ and that was so encouraging. Amy Winehouse was my idol growing up, so that was so cool to me, and then we went for coffee the next year and talked about my plans,” she laughs with still visible disbelief. The good fortune seemingly kept on growing when, straight out of school, she was snapped up by Sony subsidiary Black Butter Records. But after the relationship crumbled, it was Lily’s now-home of Fiction that would pick her up and give the singer-songwriter the support and steady framework she truly needed to flourish.

“Fiction is a very female-friendly environment that enjoys watching women thrive. They’ve got Self Esteem, Billie Marten, The Big Moon where she was pregnant on the artwork - there’s an acceptance of womanhood in all of its forms,” she nods. “I was basically raised in an all-female household. And also, being a bit older, I’ve just got a bit bored and angry, and less attached to people approving of what I’m doing. Music needs to be a nourishing thing for me where I’m growing alongside it.”

On her stunning debut ‘Reopen The World’, this integral learning is everywhere. It’s an album that embraces the multiplicities of self, giving space to it all whilst believing in the power of music to soothe and to heal; to offer answers in the bleak darknesses when it seems like there are none.

A huge inspiration came from reading Lisa Marchiano’s feminist text *The Vital Spark* - a book that celebrates Lilith, the woman said to have come before Eve, who refused to be of Adam and was thus labelled the “anti-mother”. “The book is about celebrating when it’s quite good to let your inner Lilith come out: to say, ‘No, I’m not gonna take care of you and take on your crap because I also have dreams and things I want to do in the world’,” Lyons says. “I’m not seeing my life as a vehicle for someone else. It’s its own thing, and it’s for me.”

On the joyful finger-picking of ‘Can’t Be The One’ she revels in “allowing the stroppy, pissed off version of myself” to come out, whilst also acknowledging the devastation of having to let someone go. ‘57’, meanwhile, melodically evokes The Beatles’ ‘Dear Prudence’ whilst lyrically going in the absolute opposite direction - fighting for the essentialness of “not only being ‘good’, but also being authentic and true.” The heady nostalgia of ‘Here With You Jo’ - an ode to an inspirational woman from her past - was written alongside former tourmates Flyte, as Lily tells the story of someone who “showed me a different way of looking at the world and unlocked a whole side of myself I didn’t know was there.”

Produced in collaboration with Joel Pott (Athlete, George Ezra, London Grammar) *“he was a big part of allowing me to be bigger. We could get into fights and make up and it was a good creative space,”* Lily notes, ‘Reopen The World’ often finds strength in stillness. These are songs that plant their feet in the ground, asserting themselves in ways that are soft yet centred; warm and nourishing yet defiant. Largely recorded live with minimal tinkering, the idea was to create something purposefully tactile. “I love Noah Baumbach films, and Jeff Buckley and Adrienne Lenker, and they’re all just really human,” she says. “That’s the thing I really connect with - just the bare bones being enough.”

There are devastating moments, like the profoundly vulnerable ‘Only Lonely Person’ and its yearning to create a safe meeting point: “Maybe there’s a stranger, somewhere in this song /

Singing quietly, singing quietly along”. But alongside these questions, there is also deep joy in creating your own answers. And, more than anything, ‘Reopen The World’ is a love letter to this: to the potential and the strength you can find within yourself.

“The sentiment of being closed off from the world but then choosing to step into the room - that’s the gesture of this record,” Lily says. “Banging the doors down and saying, ‘I’m coming in and I’m not hiding anymore’. I’m not in pursuit of people that are hiding away from me and I’m not hiding myself. I just want to be alive in my life.”

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