

The good, & the bad Aguilera

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She's experimental, loves to dress up and take it off, and goes gaga for the absurd. Meet the diva who's driving the pop circus horse forwards...

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Bar stools in absurd animal prints, a lobby resembling a boudoir, red lights in the elevator. These quirky fixtures on La Cienega Boulevard in Los Angeles belong to the SLS, a hotel. But even Christina Aguilera stands out in this Philippe Starck world. This afternoon her look recalls the '30s. Her hydrogen-peroxidized hair is pulled back, she wears a tight-fitting lacquered black dress and a strong gaze on her face. There is a little Lady Gaga in her mix. Madonna's 'Vogue' and 'Express Yourself' phases also shine through.

Christina is finding herself in a 'control and expression' phase. 'More than ever, I have complete control over my life and my work.'

No one should ever be ashamed of what they want to express with their art, be it creative or sexual,' she says when talking about meaning and purpose.

Since the advent of her teenybop career, she has ceaselessly been creating a storm while cementing herself into the superstar hall of fame. Musically, Christina also knew from early on what she wanted. She has worked with big names in the indie and hip-hop fraternities, she has constructed her own empire and she is among the 20 richest women in show business. She never allowed herself to fall into a life of yo-yo dieting, mocha frappuccinos to-go and prescription drugs. She left that to Britney Spears, Christina's old *Mickey Mouse Club* colleague. The two of them, together with Justin Timberlake, presented the kids' show. And her private >>





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life doesn't look too bad. In 2005 she married Jordan Bratman and in 2008 her son, Max, came into the world. Since then they've been living in the one-time house of Ozzy Osbourne. The mansion's Gothic door handles are the only reminders of the previous owner. Christina is mad for absurd and bizarre details. Another thing she is mad for is her crazy dress sense, which definitely deserves to be a topic of conversation.

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In the half-dark room of the SLS hotel, Christina sits on her chair as if it were a throne. Her glitzy, 12cm-high Louboutins lie on the floor. Her rockabilly quiff is young and innocent. She's small: small shoulders, small breasts, and beside her sits a small Starbucks cup. She takes off her sweater before we begin and you have the impulse to not give her your hand. It seems possible that you just might break her little hand. Her eyes are huge and ringed with blue make-up. She looks like a sexy Smurf.

Christina's sound on her latest album, *Bionic*, is different - very loud, but trained. With it, the little being on the chair has entered into an epic battle against the other incumbent ladies of pop: Britney, Mariah, Alicia and Lady Gaga.

Christina, which side of yourself did you show on *Bionic*?

Oh, the sound on the album leans towards the robotic elements in my voice. I have always wanted to make more of them.

Which experience first propelled you into techno and electro?

When I was 15, I heard 'Firestarter' by the Prodigy. The loudness of it appealed to me and then there was also this voice [she curtly sings 'Firestarter' in a British accent]. I always thought I would make a techno album like this. On *Bionic* you can hear my weakness for full-throttle melodies and sounds. I love machinery sounds.

Let us talk about competition in your industry. I believe that everyone who says that they think advertising is not important, is lying.

I don't think about advertising. That word doesn't exist to me. Anything that has nothing to do with my personal idea of music and creativity is irrelevant. >>



Interesting, that sounds like a masculine take on things. Women often ask how others find something and if they like it. Not me. If I only ever did what others wanted from me I would never have come this far. I practically lock myself up in my studio when I record. I listen to nothing else, and haven't in the past few months. **That means you haven't seen or heard anything of Lady Gaga over the past months. There are many comparisons between *Bionic* and the Lady Gaga sound.** I think so. [Pause, longer pause, but how should she answer? She clandestinely sips from her cup.]

Lady Gaga is often naked, or half naked. Do you feel that you have to outdo her to beat her at the game? Or, to put it in another way: do you have to heighten your own Gaganess to beat Lady Gaga? I can only talk about my own sex. I have never found myself as sharp as I find myself now. Or more attractive. Sex was always a big part of me, privately and in my work. But today I can say I've never felt better in my own skin. I have come to understand how to get exactly what I want.

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Sex. Not Lolita sex. This has always differentiated her from Britney Spears. She took off her own *Mickey Mouse* ears way earlier. She dares her entire audience. Well, America anyway. Since her 'Dirrty' video (in which she wore leather and showed off her bum cheeks in a couple of stripper costumes) she has been cited as a bad example to girls everywhere. Her grandmother said what America thought: 'I almost died when I saw how little she wore. I called her mother and asked her, "Oh my God, what is Christina doing here?" I find it sad. She is so young, and I completely understand

all criticism against her.' But Christina liked, and still likes, to talk about sex. She happily talks about her trips to Coco de Mer (Hollywood's favourite sex shop of the stars) and her Banksy art collection, of which one image depicts Queen Victoria in a lesbian pose. Okay, this we can work with. We could also talk about the sex ring she wears to round off her new look.

The ring that you are wearing on your finger in the photo shoot is by the Parisian designer Betony Vernon and joins the index finger with the thumb. Depending on application, it is either a sex or a yoga ring, true?

[She considers this for a while and then proudly exclaims] Ah! You mean my blow job ring?

So, it's not an ordinary yoga ring?

But I don't use it, oh no! If you use lubrication, it works of course. The ring makes it easier to position your hand when giving a blow job. Of course I have never used it, but I like the look of it. And I like my lady hands with this ring. I love looking at female hands. In the same way I generally prefer looking at females.

In a poll with a men's magazine from 2005, women were asked which other woman they would most want to have an affair with. The majority answered you...

Crazy, a compliment. I also prefer to look at women stripping, rather than men.



KISS THE GIRLS: Madonna and Christina lock lips at the 2003 MTV Video Music Awards at Radio City Music Hall, New York

Male strippers don't work. They tend to look hilarious. Women actually find something like the Chippendales embarrassing, don't they?

Definitely.

If I could have an affair with any woman, I would choose Madonna. You have kissed her. How was it?

It was short.

Was it only a show kiss?

No, not at all. But it was still short. [She is definitely blushing red beneath her make-up. She must have enjoyed it.]

Madonna and Christina get along famously. This much is known.

Christina is driving the pop circus horse forward effortlessly. She was already wearing insane costumes in her teens. Until now, she reached her pre-Lady Gaga peak in the 'Lady Marmalade' video for *Moulin Rouge!*, when she sported three-metre-high teased hair, a very tight corset and make-up that would scare most children. But she was the most impressive of all the divas (Pink, Mya, Lil' Kim and Missy Elliot), and she felt right at home. Christina knows that feeling from her *Mickey Mouse Club* days: 'At last I was among children who were performers and who knew at 13 that they belonged on stage and liked to dress up.' Next year she will be seen in a further flush of costume: her film *Burlesque* is being released. Her role is that of Ali, a small-town girl who follows her dreams to Los Angeles and becomes entangled in the night life. Her boss, Tess, is played by none other than Cher, the matriarch of spectacular stage outfits.

It is said that you idolise Cher so much that you would drink her bath water.

Who could be a bigger icon? She has done everything; seen it all. When we acted together I absorbed her words and movements like a sponge. She is my mentor. And my friend.

You too are obsessed with costumes?

I cannot live without the dramatic. On my last tour I had a troupe of circus acrobats. I need big hair and big make-up. And when anyone is about to have fun - call me! It is as if burlesque was made for me: women, sex and dance. Yes, that is what I am all about.

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Christina needs a small break in the late afternoon. The interview process is getting on her nerves, and she still has to deal with a summer tour and film promotions. With this, she juggles playing Rolling Stones songs to her son and spending time with her husband. However, she doesn't give the impression that she is soon to be exhausted or would turn down party invitations. Rather, it feels as if this is only the beginning. She has the kind of fierce ambition that is associated with Madonna. She has Cher's humour and, like her mentor, she pulls off the most hysterical and impossible stage costumes with such an air of ease, it is as if she were wearing her favourite pyjamas. With guardian angels such as these at her side, not much can go wrong. The only thing she has to worry about is the colour of her eye-shadow. Her eyelids are completely and dizzyingly blue. 