

# Wonderland.

## CHARLIXCX

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# CHARLI XCX

PHOTOGRAPHY LUCAS SUCHORAB

FASHION SHIRLEY AMARTEY

WORDS BELLA GLADMAN

PLANNING FOR WORLD DOMINATION VIA POP, CHARLI XCX IS THE MUSIC INDUSTRY'S SECRET MASTER OF MISDIRECTION.



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THE FIRST THING CHARLI XCX tells me is the most surprising thing about her, by her own definition. "I can do the worm, which is pretty sick." But she follows up with a more serious answer. "Maybe not many people know that I have a record label and a publishing company, as well as being an artist and a songwriter." Obviously thinking she's shown her hand too early, she laughs it off. "Feels weird that I just bragged about all that, you know? Maybe you should just say the [most surprising thing about me is that I can do the] worm."

Including her party trick, Charli fulfills all the tropes of a modern pop star incarnate. She's got the requisite smash hits, replete with bouncy beats and girlish hooks. She's got the Glastonbury performances, the world tours, the film soundtrack credits (2014's *The Fault in Our Stars*), the fashion brand collab (with Boohoo.com) and the hordes of social media followers (nearly 4 million on Instagram and Twitter combined).

Then there's the pop star image — she looks as if you tried to explain "girl power" by way of Instagram DMs — all satin bomber jackets, diamanté-encrusted sportswear, lamé bikinis and tinted sunglasses. This high gloss image would be enough for some people to think they have her measure. And she plays up to it. She's evidently whip-smart, but deliberately presents herself as pop-lite. She will glibly spout superficialities but with an almost manic, wry glitter in her eye that reveals she's only half serious. Charli knows her worth full well. She just wants to fuck with you a bit.

Charli is no label invention, no small town girl dazzled by the lights and manipulated into a slick, easily digestible package tailored to fit the Radio 1 demographic. The real deal, she's been writing her own hits since she was 14, her parents driving her to perform at raves while she was still at school. She has, unbeknownst to many, shaped the way music has sounded for the last five years, not only with her own fizzing output, but through writing credits for the biggest names in music — try Selena Gomez, Gwen Stefani and rather more unexpectedly, James Blunt, for starters. Let's not forget about her collaborations with Iona Pop (2012's "I Love It") and Iggy Azalea (2014's "Fancy") that propelled her further into the neon limelight.

In fact, Charli has her fingers in so many pies you wonder how she keeps her inch-long burgundy nails clean. In the course of our conversation, she casually mentions studio sessions with heavyweights like Blondie and

Rihanna, as well as her first music video director's credit, for R&B newcomer RAYE's single "I, U, Us."

"Pop has just got better," she enthuses. "[It's] become much more diverse and experimental... if you look at the Top 40 or the Hot 100, it's not all blonde, white female pop singers, it's everybody. It's K-pop, it's rap, it's girl bands," adding, "what even is pop nowadays?"

The definition of the genre is changing, and with it, the notion of the pop star too. Whereas there was once a schism between the mass-market artists on the cover of *Smash Hits*, and the credible yet unsuccessful indie artists who'd rather die in obscurity than admit they were into an easily accessible verse-chorus-verse banger, there's nothing shameful about the constructed nature of pop for Charli.

"I don't mind being lied to by pop stars, I kind of like it. It's better that way, it's more fun."

She cites recent collaborators PC Music's emphasis on "marketing campaigns" as indicative of the new pop order. "They have a very forward thinking idea about what pop stars should be, and how they should present themselves, and I think they're more forward thinking than a lot of record labels. I feel like [PC Music are] definitely part of the future. They're definitely part of my future, because I've worked with them so much on this album."

What seems to fascinate Charli XCX is not so much the song craft — after all, she is an old hand at that — but more the process of crafting an icon, or constructing an image.

"Before, there was so much mystery about pop stars and who they were and where they were from. There were so many lies, which I think is cool. You didn't know what was true or not, and now it seems like you need to know everything, which maybe isn't that interesting."

"I would much rather believe that my pop stars came from outer space than like, arrived on the Tube or whatever. I don't need to know."

Even her own pop moniker comes with multiple facets. When asked if she's always Charli XCX, she ponders the question. "I think there's Charli, and then there's Charli XCX; two things but they're both the same person. There's Charli, who is the fun, cute, party side, and then there's XCX, the big business global corporation."

Dreams of Charli in a business scenario come into the mind, unbidden. She'd lock the execs in the stationery cupboard, effect a hostile takeover and change the company logo to a glittery slice of pizza, before taking the interns for a Champagne lunch.

World domination does appear to be on the cards. Putting her album out next year is the next step, shortly followed by: "playing the shit out of my new single. Being everywhere. Being worldwide. Worldwide XCX Enterprises. Here we come!"

And the Charli XCX end game? Once again she gives two conflicting answers; one lofty in its ambition, the other artfully vacuous, both equally true.

"There's no end game really. Except to live forever, and be frozen. To always be here and leave my mark on the world," she says. She swiftly goes on to make light of her naked ambition, declaring, "Right now I just want to party. That's the end goal. To make music, to party, and to party to the music that was made, and then repeat. Rinse and repeat. And the beat goes on."

This is a girl who sees stardom for what it is — a game — and what's more, she knows how to win it and have fun while doing so.

*"After The Afterparty" by Charli XCX is out now.*

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