

Interview

MUSIC

IN THE LIFE OF ZELLA DAY

BY GERRY VISCO



Zella Day grew up in Pinetop, Arizona, a small, desert town with a population of 7,000. A classic American girl influence by Bob Dylan, Neil Young, and Fleetwood Mac, Day began singing and playing guitar at the tender age of nine in her family-owned coffee shop. Her introduction to the music industry came in 2012, when she released a cover of the White Stripes' "Seven Nation Army." While it's tempting to compare Day to ubiquitous pop divas such as Lorde and Lana Del Rey, the songwriter has her own charmed style. Unlike some of her peers, her songs are more about being in sync with the universe rather than vice versa.

Two weeks from today, Day will release her a four-track EP featuring songs like "Sweet Ophelia," a dreamy little ditty about the loss of virginity. She will also play at CMJ in New York. In the meantime we are pleased to premiere the below remix of Day's "Compass."

GERRY VISCO: Where is your tour going to be? You're going all over the world?

ZELLA DAY: Right now the only thing that I have planned is CMJ, so at the end of October I'm going to be there for a couple weeks. I don't have a world tour planned yet but definitely in the future, hopefully.

VISCO: Your EP is coming out on the 21st—how long have you been working on the songs?

DAY: These particular songs were born in the same time period, so last year in mid-summer. They've been hanging out for a while until we decided to release an EP.

VISCO: And how long have you been performing?

DAY: I've been playing shows now with my band for about a year, but professionally for two and a half years when I signed a publishing deal. That's definitely when I considered myself a working artist.

VISCO: What brought you to your sound? It's very ethereal and lovely. Would you call it indie pop or folk?

DAY: Thank you, I love when people call it folk pop. I've always been a singer-songwriter—it started off with me and the guitar, just writing songs, so they were very simple. When I got in the studio it took me probably three years to get where I am now—being open to experimenting with new songs, being comfortable with where the songs were headed. I'm happy with where they are because they feel very genuine and authentically who I am.

VISCO: What kind of music were you inspired by over the years?

DAY: Growing up a bunch of different kinds. Bob Dylan was a big one for me. Joni Mitchell. As far as lyrics go, amazing writers. As far as sound, in the last three years electronic music has really influenced me in ways it had never before. Frank Ocean was a big one for me. His album *Channel Orange* was really inspirational. His use of synthesizers and programmed drum beats are amazing. I also really loved Queen.

VISCO: Do you have a band? What is your set up?

DAY: I have a band, but they were brought together a year ago for the sake of playing my music. The band is just Zella Day and I have people that play my material. They're amazing and great and all very talented, professional musicians. It's been quite the easy journey with them. They're not crazy rock stars so I haven't lost anybody yet.

VISCO: You live in L.A. now. Have you become a big city girl now?

DAY: No. Funny enough some friends from Portland and I have been talking about that a lot. If I have a family down the road, I don't know if I could ever raise them in the city because I am a small town girl at heart. I definitely long for the mountains. When I lived in Pinetop I just wanted to leave—I thought the city was where I belonged. But now that I'm here, I love it for what it is. It's brought me closer to my art and put me in the right place as far as having people around me. It's very inspiring, but I miss our little town. There's something very simple and beautiful about growing up in a small place. That's where my heart is, for real.

VISCO: I guess you knew everybody in town.

DAY: Oh yeah, you can't go anywhere without knowing somebody.

VISCO: It'll take a long time for that to happen in L.A.

DAY: I don't think it really does happen. People are just in and out all the time. L.A. is a kind of a landing place for some people. People are there for a short time until they get what they need and then they go somewhere else.

VISCO: In terms of your writing inspiration, what is your philosophy? What are your obsessions?

DAY: I think it's all over the place. Much of my inspiration definitely comes from the human experience. I'm really inspired by love like a lot of people are. My art, my childhood, and changes and transitions in life and how they

impact me and cause me to write music.

VISCO: It seems like you've become a fashion icon.

DAY: I don't know about being an icon yet but I definitely do love fashion; it's really important for me to resemble my music. I definitely look like I sound. Creating an image is an art form in itself, it's a really fun part of being a musician.

VISCO: Well you have a whole persona, which translates into your sound.

DAY: Exactly. Moving out to L.A. did that for me. Because at Pinetop I just studied music, and there was no pressure to look any certain way, and so being able to sing and play guitar was enough. But when I came out to L.A., there's a whole image that you put out there and people really feed off of that because of social media platforms. And sometimes someone will see a picture of me before they hear one of my songs. It's really important to have it all figured out so that you can portray what you want people to see. It's been fun for me to figure out what I am in the world of fashion. I pull more now from my hometown, the aesthetic of the mountains and Arizona and the old western, vintage kind of vibe mixed with a sort of California bohemia.

VISCO: Are you thinking about your album or another EP?

DAY: I have all the songs ready for an album—I could release an album tomorrow—but I think the whole point with the EP and having this slow build is I want my album to come with shows and bands and people who are anticipating the release. I want to play for as many people as I can.

VISCO: You've been building up an audience now and how does that feel?

DAY: It's really surreal when I play shows, I'll have three or four people who are in the front row who are singing every word to my songs. The first time I experienced that I was like, "Are they mocking me? Is this a joke?" But it's not a joke. They actually identify with my music and that is something that I'm getting used to.

VISCO: How does your family feel now that you're a celebrity?

DAY: They make fun of me! They love to tell me, "Zella sign this! Will you forget about us now that you're famous?" But we all know that's bullshit. I'm definitely not close to stardom, but maybe someday and my family will be with me always, hanging out backstage.

VISCO: Are any of your family members musical also or did it come to you on your own?

DAY: I definitely get my artistry and my vocal talent from my mother and mother's side. She sang in a jazz trio band so growing up my dad would always take me to see her play and she has a beautiful voice. When I was little and started to sing, she supported me and let that fire burn. She always knew what it took as a support system.

ZELLA DAY WILL PLAY IN NEW YORK AT SANTOS PARTY HOUSE ON OCTOBER 23 AND BROOKLYN NIGHT BAZAAR ON OCTOBER 25. HER NEW EP COMES ON OCTOBER 21. FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT DAY'S WEBSITE. <http://www.interviewmagazine.com/music/zella-day>