

F L A U N T

# OLIVIA HOLT







I'm sitting in the only unused office at flaut's Malthusian Hollywood Headquarters. I'm nervous. I'm waiting. I've been here for close to thirty minutes, passing the time with Olivia Holt's latest singles.

The phone rings.

"Hello, is this Joey?" The voice explodes into the room like strawberry bubble gum.

The pep has to belong to Holt, whose name, incidentally, I misspell as Holy without fail. I've come to understand it as a sign, in the same way someone may sense significance in seeing recurring numbers in the world. It's usually hard to know what exactly is being signified, or whether it's warning or encouraging you to continue on this path or that, but it feels less ambiguous in this case. In this case, the sign is positive and, taken in a secular sense, predictive.

In a matter of time, everyone and their mother will know the name Olivia Holt.

Holt, at twenty years old, has already seen her fair share of success. She's been involved in the industry for about eight years now, getting her first break on after-your-era Disney XD's Kickin' It, following some stints on commercials for Kidz Bop 14 and Bratz dolls.

She spent six of those eight years on the Disney lot, until she turned eighteen and her contract expired. Though this happened coincidentally, and not literally on the day to be sure, it functions well as a metaphor, as life tends to. Holt, in her career and life, is two years into adulthood.

Just listen to "Generous." She's feeling generous. She wants to give you "that ahh touch, till it hurts." It's pure radio sex pop with a music video directed by Chris Applebaum, who's responsible for that hypersexualized Carl's Jr. commercial featuring a soaked Paris Hilton eating a wet burger on a sudsy Bentley. There's not much else to say about that, other than to clarify that Holt hasn't even come close to "that".

"It's been surreal," she states simply of 2018, a year that finds Holt working tirelessly on her debut LP and starring in Marvel's Cloak and Dagger, Freeform's adaptation of a comic book serial that was mildly popular in the 80s. Cloak is dark; Dagger is light. They come from very different backgrounds, which have instilled in them values that make the two very incompatible. A Google will tell you they become romantically involved and learn a lot from each other.

Cloak and Dagger, AKA Tandy and Tyrone, played by Holt and co-star Aubrey Joseph, are bonded by a force that saved them both from childhood near-death experiences, after a terrifically traumatizing series of events that leaves them both bereft of the person in their lives who loved them most. Oh—and Dagger can produce weapons-grade light beams from the palms of her hands. The show is getting rave reviews, just premiered to more viewers than any Freeform series since Pretty Little Liars and, to quote Deadline, "After three days of TV playback, the premiere jumped by 78% in total viewers over its L+SD average [sic] (920,000 to 1.64 million—the largest-ever L+3 lift of any Freeform debut."

"I'm really proud of it. I'm really confident in it. And I'm really excited for what it's gonna do for our society. I feel like it's a game-changer in so many ways."

I'm very curious what Marvel's Cloak and Dagger is going to do for our society.

"I mean, we focus on a lot of cultural issues. There's a lot of heavy themes and topics: police brutality, sexual assault, addiction, racism and so much more. Talking about it, making it part of norm, not sugar coating it; this is monumental in television. We're making history in that way."

The material proved to be challenging for Holt, the maturing actor. "I wasn't used to having to be in such a negative headspace all day," she admits. Obviously, the characters on *Kickin' It* never became sexually violent; there weren't worlds of trauma residing within the characters she portrayed. Deep pain was not part of her job at Disney.

This isn't to say her time at Disney was for naught. Aside from providing her with an active social network, Holt's time on the Disney lot offered her the opportunity to "learn from the different directors coming in, and the camera operators, and to go up to the writers' room. All of those things were things I was soaking up and learning," Holt recalls. "I think that as a kid, you don't really understand. I didn't know if this was something I wanted to do for the rest of my life, but I knew I liked it 'right now' and that it was exciting and it was fun. Thank God it's turned into this insane passion of mine, because there were a lot of sacrifices we had to make—not just me, but my family as well."

I'm sure uprooting a family, transplanting the unit from outside-of-Memphis to the biggest city west of the Mississippi, was challenging.<sup>4</sup> And flying back and forth for two years as the Holts did—that certainly sounds destabilizing.

"Some of the challenges my family and I have faced, I think they just made us stronger in the end. My family and I have a better relationship now since we went through all of that as a team." As Holt puts it, "Everything happens for a reason."

And music?

"This year I'm making music a priority." Her excitement is palpable and sincere. She, incidentally, speaks of her work with more passion and conviction than you'll hear from most of the dilettantes pursuing the craft. It's not hard to tell she has a vision, and that she will stop at nothing to make it a reality. "I'm the most confident I've ever felt," Holt says of acting and music and the people she's been spending her time with—people like Frank Hall and Mozella, "Femmebot" and "Wrecking Ball" co-writers, respectively.

"I just remember having a conversation with them, and a couple weeks later I got "Generous." I remember listening to it and being, like, this is the song I've been looking for."

What does that mean; I got "Generous"?

She tells me the process is different every time, but sometimes "you go in and you really have a clear vision of what you wanna say that day," which was the case with "Generous." Holt sits down with her songwriters, tells them how she's been feeling recently, what she's been thinking about. Hall and Mozella digest this conversation and synthesize it—Holt's experiences and feelings—into a pop song. It's an interesting process, and honestly makes me think differently of pop music. It's become easier, since speaking with Holt, to identify the humanity buried beneath the compression and often-trite lyrical universalities that oversaturate the genre.

When I ask if the transition's been hard, if she's felt any pullback from her Disney family following the success of her single, she responds quickly and firmly, with perhaps a touch of mild frustration in her tone: "Here's the thing: I spent my childhood working with that company and now I'm focusing on what it's like to be an adult." She continues, "I think for me it's just been important to stay true to who I am. As cheesy as that sounds, I think it's just important to have your own opinions and use your voice."

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Holt identifies her dad, who played in a hair band in the '80s, as the primary catalyst for her interest in music. When I ask her if she feels any lasting influence from the music her father showed her growing up, she shares: "If this says anything, I've been to three Van Halen concerts."

With that said, it sounds like we won't hear much in the vein of Van Halen on the record. Her favorite artists at the moment are Jessica Lynn, Ellie Goulding, Kendrick Lamar, and Eminem.

"It's not only pop," she clarifies. "I'm throwing in some R&B and some soul and some alt and some organic instruments because that's what I'm drawn to. I think there's a unique way of making music yours. Not only lyrically. I think there's a style you can find that's your own. That whole exploration process has been really fun and exciting for me." The only thing she's sure of: she wants it to feel cohesive.

"Like Good Kid, M.A.A.D City or The Marshall Mathers LP?"

She laughs politely. "Yeah."







