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ZELLA DAY TALKS PLAYING COACHELLA, FEMALE EMPOWERMENT AND HER FIRST FASHION WEEK

Meet the singer you won't be able to get out of your head.

MOST POPULAR



Alexandra Valenti

By Erica Gonzales

At first glance, Zella Day seems like every Coachella girl's dream come true: wide-brim hat, dirty blonde waves falling at the ribs, dressed in breezy lace with a delicate-yet-edgy septum piercing. But Day is beyond the festival fangirl. She's who the fangirls are flocking to see.

The singer-songwriter, 20, had a coming-of-age turn of events last year after dropping her second studio album, *Kicker*, in June. After debuting at #7 on Billboard's Alternative Chart, she went on to tour the U.S. and Europe. She's been making music since she was 10, but the Pinetop, Arizona native credits her breakthrough to "becoming a young woman" and newfound independence (she moved out of her mom's house and roomed with **fellow singer BØRNS** in L.A. for a bit).

Day's recognizable voice is a hybrid of tough and airy, floating over her folk melodies with a slight rocker touch. Her lyrics are visual and relatable—from the crazy love affair painted in "Hypnotic" to tear-drenched "Jameson," which portrays falling in love with an alcoholic.

For an artist as hands-on as Day, music isn't isolated. "I want the people who are consuming my music and any of my creative content to feel like it's really coming from me," she says. That applies to everything from music videos to the girl-power initiative she's launching called Headstrong Mama, named after a lyric in "Hypnotic."

Now, she says her next frontier is fashion; but from her calculated (and enviable) bohemian ensembles, it looks like she's already claimed her stake. To Day, attending her first fashion week in February—and possibly performing at a few shows—is merely dipping her toes in the water.

But before that storm hits, the singer-songwriter talked to BAZAAR about her triumphs so far.

Harper's BAZAAR: How does it feel to be playing Coachella for the first time this year?

Zella Day: It feels good, it feels like a badge of honor, honestly. Amongst the artists here, in California, that festival is such a big deal. People live and die for Coachella. So to be a part of it on such a big scale is really flattering, and I feel really lucky to be part of the community.

HB: You played a handful of festivals last summer, too. How do you handle running around from one to another?

ZD: I think festivals are way more easygoing than back-to-back tours are. 'Cause for me, when you get to go to a festival, you get to hang out all day, and you're really taken care of, and there's usually a little artist village where all the artists have their own tents, and it's catered, and then you go and play an hour-long set depending on where you are on the lineup. And then you go back and you hang out and you even get to go watch other artists play. So it's really just a fun interactive experience for everybody.

HB: Where do your descriptive lyrics and a distinct sound draw from?

ZD: Well I am growing so much and changing so much as a human being from being a young woman, to feeling more like an adult. The more that I travel, the more people that I meet, the more experiences that are really a testament to the kind of person that I am, and you hear about my experiences and my growth through my music. I think that that is really relatable. The more transparent you are about, you know, the not so happy times, or the happy times, or the things that you're embarrassed or ashamed of or proud of, it's all in Kicker, and all in my music. I'm just inspired by life in general and what it's bringing to me.

HB: Did growing up Arizona and starting out singing in coffee shops influence the kind of music that you went into?

ZD: Yes, I mean I was surrounded by a lot of singer-songwriters, which is pretty typical "coffee shop." I started playing open mics when I was nine, and so the acoustic guitar has always been an extension of my body, even, because I've been doing it since I was such a child. I definitely was inspired by a lot of folk music. I was surrounded by that and I definitely took a liking to lyricism, and a lot of what our greatest folk artists are saying in their music. I loved Bob Dylan when I was a kid.

HB: Your biggest single right now is "Hypnotic." Can you walk me through what it was like making that and what it meant for you writing it?

ZD: "Hypnotic" is about the tension between the man and a woman when it comes to the power struggle in a new relationship. The love is so powerful that both people have to surrender. I think that's the funny thing about dating somebody for the first time, it's kind of a question of who wears the pants, or who's gonna text you first, how much am I supposed to put myself out there, and it makes you feel a little bit crazy. But at the end of the day, it's not about that. And if it's the right person you don't have to worry about that.

HB: What are you working on right now? Are you already working on the next album?

ZD: Right now, today, I am working a lot on the Headstrong Mama campaign that I'm kind of developing with my mom, who I've been making these t-shirts with. So I'm kind of starting a movement there. I'm really looking forward to Coachella. There's a lot of preparation that goes into that. I want it to be a very special set that I play. I'm looking forward to attending fashion week in New York, that will be great, I'll probably be playing a couple of shows there, whether they be acoustic or full band, I'm not sure yet. And I'm writing all the time. I'm a writer, so the writing doesn't stop. And when it becomes time to make another record, I'm going to be well prepared.

HB: Tell me a little more about the Headstrong Mama campaign. What's it about?

ZD: It's kind of about celebrating strong feminine energy. I want men and women to both feel a part in the flourishing of female power. So I want to celebrate that power that women have, that they acquired and are still acquiring all over the world. And it's kind of my way of joining the movement and bringing positive attention to an overgrowing awareness of females everywhere who are breaking the mold.

HB: Did you take inspiration for this campaign from your life? Were you surrounded by a lot of strong females?

ZD: Yeah. I had a really supportive upbringing. I was lucky to be in a household where whatever I wanted to do was supported and my music was always such a natural part of me, and I was never told that I couldn't do it. So I've always been able to follow my heart and my instincts and what I love, that being my art. And I know that not everybody really has that chance or that environment, the same one that I did, so I kind of want to help in any way that I can.

HB: You have a really cool, Cali boho kind of look. How did you develop your style?

ZD: So I lived in Arizona and I moved out to California about four years ago and I always saw myself as this California boho girl. That was in my mind, my ideal; that was my paradigm. And when I got here, I started realizing the more time that I lived here, what made me special was that I was from a different place. That place being Pinetop, Arizona, the mountains of Arizona. And I started to kind of dive into the culture from back home: the Native Americans, the Apache reservations, southwest influences, even John Wayne, all the old cowboys, just the colors of the desert. Everything that I knew as a part of growing up, I embraced more when I was in California. So I would say that Arizona is a very big influence for me. I also come from a family of 'golden hippie child' women who were so amazing in the '70s, and I've grown up looking at photos of them with their crochet tops and no bras. So it's very hard to find me on a day where I'm actually wearing a bra. And I'm really inspired by the '60s and '70s era. I've always been a fan of natural beauty, and those eras really, really display that.

HB: Was fashion always something that interested you?

ZD: Yeah, it was something that interested me, but in my environment growing up, I grew up in a small town of 7,000 people, and the only place to buy clothing was either online or at Wal-Mart. I kid you not. There wasn't a mall, there was no flea market, there was no vintage shopping, I didn't have a Buffalo Exchange. But I did take risks in my own way as much as I could, having the information that I did. So I definitely was different, but I'm not gonna lie, a really big trend in my high school, especially for the girls who rode horses and the rodeo queens, was the bedazzled jeans. So I definitely owned a pair of bedazzled jeans when I was in junior high school. But also I was pushing the boundaries. Like I said, I loved California hippie style. I was feeling a little bit repressed, as far as fashion goes, and when I moved to California, I got to fully express myself in ways that I had been waiting for because I have access to some of the best vintage shops and warehouses in the country. And flea markets are really big for me. I'm starting to develop relationships with designers here. For example, for Seth Meyers, the late night show I just played, I had a custom jumpsuit made for me. It was one of a kind. I'm excited about mixing vintage pieces and custom pieces so that everything I wear is just an expression of who I am as an artist.



Day in a custom jumpsuit performing on Late Night with Seth Meyers on Jan 4.

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HB: Who are some of your favorite designers or vintage stores out there?

ZD: Saint Laurent, I have always loved, and I have a couple of pieces that are my prized possessions. Hedi Slimane and everything that he has done with artists has been really inspiring for me. I feel like they have chosen such perfect people to represent their brand, so I pay close attention to what they do. Also as far as vintage, I live really close to Squaresville, which is really great. I really like going to American Rag, that's a really fun one, they always have good selections. When I'm home and I have a free Sunday, I'll go to the flea market on Fairfax, and also the Rose Bowl is amazing, in Pasadena. It's every second Sunday of the month. Those are kind of like my little secrets.

HB: Who are some of your style icons?

ZD: I am a fan of Jane Birkin, Bianca Jagger, Stevie Nicks definitely. Mick Jagger has also been a big one for me, I really love him and I love how his style is unisex, universal, androgynous. I really enjoy Joni Mitchell and her California bohemian little self. I guess somebody a little more current, I like Erin Wasson and also Abbey Lee Kershaw; I like the vibe she's got going on.

HB: You got to experience Stella McCartney's Pre-Fall 2016 presentation at Amoeba Records recently, right? What was that like for you?

ZD: That was crazy. I got to wear a Stella McCartney dress, and I took my little sister Mia, and we got to hang out, and Pink played a set, and Brian Wilson played a set. I got to hang out with the Haim girls a little bit, I met Kate Hudson, who has been a supporter of my music. It was a really amazing place to be.



Zella Day attends Stella McCartney Pre-Fall 2016 with her sister.

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