

LILY

*When she left music to start a family,
Lily Rose Cooper said she wouldn't be back.
So what changed? Alexander Fury finds out*

Photography **David Vasiljevic** Fashion **Anne-Marie Curtis**

like Lily Allen. There's her music, of course - but that's not the extent of her appeal. I like that she's outspoken amongst a sea of bland celebrities. I like her dry humour, and that she Photoshopped her head onto a turkey on Twitter at Christmas.

Actually, Allen's Twitter pinpoints one of the best things about her: she is normal. It's easy to forget just how mega Lily's stardom is. Her 2006 debut, *Alright, Still*, sold over 2.5 million copies and garnered a Grammy nomination. Her second album, *It's Not Me, It's You*, went triple platinum in the UK. Her success is huge, but Lily, 28, refuses to act the part. Nothing is fake: she's straight-up, which is something few pop stars - especially female ones - are permitted to be.

I meet her at the Hammersmith Apollo, a month after the release of *Hard Out Here*, the first track from her eagerly awaited third studio album, coming this May. The whole album, she says, is about: 'Female empowerment - being a mum and doing the right thing when they're babies. But about ownership

of your sexuality, too.' She plays me a track, *Insincerely Yours*, while she gleefully mouths along with its incendiary lyrics, trashing various papped pop-culture figures, including the Delevingnes. Another track reels off a list of Allen's loves and hates in the contemporary music scene: 'I'm ready for all their comparisons/I think it's dull and it's embarrassing,' she opines in that sweet voice. 'I'm switching off, no longer listening/I've had enough of persecution and conditioning.' How's that for a feminist anthem? 'As embarrassing and as lame as it sounds, I listen to my own music a lot,' she says. 'What's good is there's no mistaking the message!' she cackles.

Lily is at the Apollo to perform at the *Under 1 Roof* charity benefit. She has no entourage, just her brother Alfie and his mates (girlfriend Jaime Winstone and his *Game Of Thrones* co-star, Gwendoline Christie), plus her husband of nearly three years, Sam Cooper. Her daughters, two-year-old Ethel Mary and Marnie Rose, one, are at home in Gloucestershire with the nanny. >



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Previous page:
Silk dress, Miu Miu
This page: Embellished
cotton jacket, Marni. PVC
skirt, Miu Miu. Acrylic
sunglasses, Givenchy
Eyewear. White gold and
diamond ring, Solange
Azagury-Partridge

David Vasiljevic

Leather coat, sleeveless nylon top, and long-sleeved nylon top, all Miu Miu. Gold and pink sapphire ring, Dina Kamal



David Vasiljevic

COVER STAR

She smokes out of the window as we drink cheap white wine. It's remarkably similar to being at a mate's house. Except, you know, it's Lily Allen.

Well, sort of. She's Lily Cooper now, as she announced after she bowed out of the music game in 2010. 'My life is a bit schizophrenic,' Lily says, speaking in measured tones. 'I'm two people. I'm Lily Allen the... singer, and music person.' The pause there was where others would've said 'pop star' - even Lily went to say it. 'And Lily Cooper, the wife and mother,' she continues.

Whenever I've encountered her, it's been the Allen alter-ego - backstage, on photo shoots, making a rare London Fashion Week appearance - that I meet. Actually, that's not strictly true: the last time I worked with her, I saw the transformation from one to the other: Cooper arrived in pyjamas, wrapped in a duvet. Allen emerged after hair and make-up - tougher, harder somehow. Afterwards, she stripped it all off and went back to her kids. Her respective schedules are punishing: I won't speculate which Lily comes first, but our interview date moves three times as daughter Ethel is sick. At the Apollo, where we finally meet, she's full-throttle pop star: fags, booze, rock 'n' roll.

I ask if returning has been difficult after a three-year hiatus. She adds a preface, splitting herself in two again: 'I hate speaking about myself in the third person, but it's helpful here. Lily Allen has found it quite difficult and stressful trying to reconnect. And Lily Cooper is happy because she's not sitting at home playing with toys and speaking with two human beings that can't speak back. There was a void. I'm a creative person, I like to speak my mind. Making music is the perfect vehicle for that. It would be different if I was on *Made In Chelsea* - that isn't a vessel for creativity. I need somewhere to put my... stuff.' That stuff has been well-documented: the drug-use as a teenager has been over-amplified, but Lily did drop out of school aged 15, has coped with two miscarriages, a struggle with bulimia and an often tempestuous relationship with her family. Frankly, it's not *Made In Chelsea* material.

Motherhood and the urge for a settled home life were the main reasons she left music - but not the only ones. 'By the end, I was physically and mentally exhausted and really pissed off,' she says. 'This was pre-phone hacking scandal, so those lines hadn't been drawn. People just didn't give a shit, and there weren't any barriers. I did feel at that time that I wanted to leave and never come back. I wanted to concentrate on making a family. I've done that. I love that. I thought I'd be better suited to that. I love my kids and I wouldn't trade them in for any-

thing - no mother would - but I'm not the sort of person who can sit at home and look after them all day.'

This, it seems, took her by surprise. 'My mother was 18 when she had my sister, and then - unfortunately for her - married my father and had me and my brother. He abandoned her when I was four, so she had to work. I think, deep down, I resented her for not being there. At the same time, I knew she had to do it, otherwise she wouldn't be able to support us. In my head, I was like: "I'm not going to be like that, I'm going to be a real mum." But it's not like that.' She grins widely, and shrugs. 'You get there and it's nice, but...'

If we're talking War Of The Lilys, that makes it sound like Allen is winning. Not so. 'I don't want to be a famous person,' Lily states categorically. 'But the nature of the industry, when I have an album to promote, I *do* want to be famous. I want people to buy it! And I want them to go to my shows. That's how it works. I think of myself as a product in that sense. But

I don't want that frenzy. I think it's weird for children to grow up around that.' Allen, of course, speaks from experience.

I have to pose the clichéd 'career-juggling question' - but it feels trite. I confess this: after all, I'd never ask her male counterparts. But Lily has a different take. 'I think the reason you'd ask me that question is that a woman has a draw to her child. When I'm at home trying to sleep because I've been on a shoot until 4am and I can hear my child crying in the next room, no matter how tired I am, I can't *not* get out of bed to make sure she's OK. Even though I know my husband is there, and it's being dealt with. There's a natural instinct. I love my husband, and he loves our children, but it's not the same.'

The 4am finishes and the push-pull struggle with fame can't be easy. 'Plus, the marketplace has completely changed,' she says. 'There are people doing my job much better than I did before, who I feel threatened by.' Beyoncé's name comes up again and again - her self-titled fifth album, with its barrage of accompanying videos, is released the day of our ELLE shoot: Lily downloads it in hair and make-up: 'It's a game changer!' she proclaims. Is she someone Lily admires? 'I would really love to wax lyrical about the things I think are wrong with Product Beyoncé...' Lily begins, then catches herself, 'but I think she's amazing.'

She might have all but stopped mouthing off about her peers in person, but her music is still primed to cause controversy. *Hard Out Here* kicked up a storm with *everything*, from the attire of Lily's back-up dancers to the balloons, interpreted and over-analysed. 'People read into things so much. It's a blessing and a curse. That's why music and film industry interviews that people do are boring. Everyone knows you can >

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rewind, and dissect. It's just easier to go [she drops into a faux-American accent for comedic effect] "Oh no, I love everyone. And everything. And I'm just really happy. All the time. Sorry, did you ask a question?" Lily grins. The only things that weren't over-analysed about *Hard Out Here* were, ironically, the words: her empowering statement, reclaiming the word bitch. Of course she realised that the video and song may trigger a furor, which is why she released it just after her 'saccharine, middle-of-the road' (her words) cover of *Somewhere Only We Know*. 'I took the John Lewis job because I knew I had *Hard Out Here*, which wasn't a radio record because it has the word 'bitch' in it 72 times. I wanted people to go, "Oh she's done exactly what we thought she would do." Then, bam! Four days later, I'm in a controversial video.' She flashes her eyes and deadpans. 'Being a racist. Which I'm *not*.'

The latter accusation was shocking for Lily. 'Not one person that I showed it to - including lots of people of colour - mentioned the race issue. What came up a lot was the baggy pussy balloons.' In case you aren't one of the 16.5 million (at last count) to have watched the video, Lily cavorts in front of metre-high metallic balloons spelling out: 'Lily Allen has a baggy pussy' - a jibe at Robin Thicke's equally controversial *Blurred Lines* video, where the balloons make bold claims about the size of his penis.

She was also accused of objectification, of sexism. 'That upset me,' she says of the slut-shaming claims against her lyric: 'Don't need to shake my arse for you/cause I've got a brain'. 'I've taken my clothes off, I *do* shake my arse when I'm dancing at a club. I'm not ashamed of it. It's more the notion that I don't *have* to do that, because I've got other things going for me. It's not about thinking those things are shameful in any way. We all do them. We enjoy them. I have sex with my husband!' She pauses, shrugs. 'I don't look down on anybody. Except myself. I hate the idea that people think I'm looking down on people. I'm not.'

'I understand people will have their point of view and will interpret things in the way they want to - that's the beauty of creating something. You put it out there and people make of it what they want. But it was upsetting to get some of that feedback. I felt like I was being brave doing the baggy pussy thing, and that got lost. That was meant to be the feminist moment. It was a brave thing to do - say that you have an enormous vagina!' Cue laughter. But she is making a serious point, albeit a tongue-in-cheek one. 'I strive to do that, and say the things that people are all thinking. I feel like that's my talent, that's my thing. It comes naturally to me. I can't sing the middle-of-the-road stuff, I can't write it! Everything comes from me.'

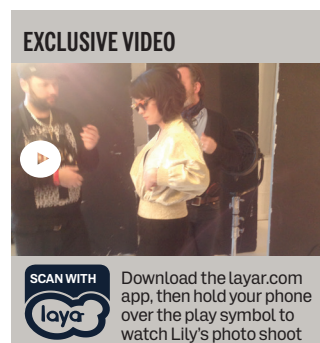
At least it does now. At one point, record company

management (now long-gone) tried to force Lily into an All Saints-style mould. Cargo trousers were discussed. She wasn't impressed. She has plenty of fashion nous, thank you very much. 'I'm a big advocate for me wearing fashion and not it wearing me. People can see when I'm uncomfortable. I have fun with fashion.' She brandishes a fluoro-pink fake designer bag and grins (the bag is as hideous as it sounds). 'It's a LOL. That mix of high fashion and low, low fashion.' Just like those trademark prom dresses and trainers (although Lily's now in spike heels and Saint Laurent).

She may be able to poke fun at fashion but that's not to say Lily doesn't take it seriously. Likewise, the pressure it exerts on female pop stars. 'Without being the "I love my body, because my body gave me my children" cliché, it's hard. It's hard to go back to being a pop star. Beyoncé touches on it in *Pretty Hurts*, a track on her new album. It's difficult to keep up and try to be perfect. I felt quite brave shooting the *Hard Out Here* video. In all my past videos and photo shoots, I've starved myself for days to get into what I felt was a good enough shape. But in this one, I was wearing leggings! [I've never heard 'leggings' being spat with so much venom.] And a skin-tight T-shirt and a bra over the top - you can see the bulge! It wasn't necessarily pretty, but I felt very strongly that I wanted to do that. Because I'm a woman now, and I have two babies, and I don't want to hide it.' She throws her hands up for emphasis. 'I could be skinny if I wanted to, by exercising a lot, and I just don't have the time right now. Every second I'm not working I'm spending with my children. For me to take another extra hour and half out of my day to get thin, I'm not doing it.'

It's a pressure felt by women universally, which doesn't make it right, but *does* make it relatable. 'Of course I'd rather look like Kate Moss than look like myself,' says Lily. 'I wish I didn't feel like that, and I think the reason we feel like that is because of the imagery we're fed all the time. Women are still expected, in some weird way, to kind of... sit there and look pretty. And not talk. So often, when women say things that are "outspoken" [she jabs out two air-quotes.] Or, as I call it, "just saying things" [punctuated with more sarcastic jabs]. People jump on that and try to make us look stupid for having an opinion. That doesn't happen with men. Come on, we've done feminism. People are aware of it. Can it just happen now?' ●

Lily's new single, *Air Balloon*, will be released on 2 March, with her album following in May



Hair: Tony Collins at Streeters. Make-up: Andrew Gallimore at CLM Hair and Make Up using Dior Trianon Spring Collection and Capture Totale Dream Skin. Manicure: Michelle Humphrey at LMC Worldwide using Maybelline New York. Props: Alexandra Leavey at Soho Management. Seamstress: Alice Ratcliffe at chapmanburrell.com. Behind-the-scenes film: Jamie Jones. With thanks to Spring Studios.

Silk top, Michael van der Ham. Wool skirt, Roland Mouret. Patent-leather shoes, Miu Miu. Satin belt, Lanvin

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