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NOMINATED BY TINASHE

**BEBE REXHA**

Now might be the perfect time for pop punk to make a serious comeback, and although her music is hardly described as such, Bebe Rexha's attitude alone could funnel many an angst-ridden teen in that direction. Since her debut EP, *I Don't Wanna Grow Up*, was released this May, the born-and-raised New Yorker has been stomping across stages on the Warped Tour, distancing herself from the electro tracks that put her name on the mainstream map. "Everybody wants to label me as an EDM girl," she says, half in the British accent she admittedly used to fake on songs like "Take Me Home," her 2013 Cash Cash collab. "I mean, I was in a band with Pete Wentz [Black Cards, 2010–12]. When you come watch me live, it's like you're fucking watching Marilyn Manson on stage. Like, it starts with a choir."

On set for this shoot, Rexha's mother and brother stop by to see her get glammed—or rather, scrubbed. After the false lashes are pulled off and the blow-out soaked, Rexha's mother comments in a thick Staten Island accent that she

should always wear this amount of makeup (meaning less). But bright-eyed Bebe is the first to admit she's insecure about her looks. "I was bullied," she says bluntly. "When I was like, 12, there would be 30 girls at the cafeteria table and they would go, Pretty, pretty, pretty, and then when they got to me they'd say, Ugly. And honestly, whatever. I'm actually glad that I was like that because it kind of makes me me."

After hiding behind songwriting for a time (her extensive credits include Eminem and Rihanna's Grammy-winning "The Monster," and Tinashe's "All Hands On Deck"), Rexha stepped back into the spotlight, and while there, aired out the complicated relationship she has with her own sense of self-worth. Fans have echoed her laments ecstatically via social media, often citing the feeling of finally being understood. Songs like "I Can't Stop Drinking About You" go where the songs Rexha has written for others can't. They infuse the most emotional components of dance music (the

builds and drops) with punky disregard for the radio, lyrically. "We've had this candy-coated pop," says Rexha of the state of music today, "and right now we're kind of in a grayer place, but not in a negative way. That's what happens with music in general, or fashion. Maybe we want to dress all crazy, and call ourselves all this crazy stuff, and auto-tune, and now this whole new group of girls have come into the spotlight." She nods to Tove Lo, up next to get her portrait taken. "It's really raw."

Of course, rawness in song lyrics always leads to speculation about its subject. "Yeah, if you make me fall in love with you, I'm going to write a song about you," Rexha laughs. "If you make me happy I'm going to write a fucking happy song, and if you screw me over I will dis you in a song, and you will never die. You will be in a song, so you will forever know you were a douchebag. Isn't that scary?" **NS**

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