

NKD MAG

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IF LIGHTS ISN'T ALREADY ON YOUR radar, you're doing it wrong. The Canadian singer/songwriter's forthcoming album *Skin&Earth* is a serious game changer, incorporating an accompanying com-

ic book to go with the 14-track record. Growing up, Lights recalls a childhood surrounded by the arts. "I was always learning," she says. "Music, painting, drawing, and poetry were heav-

ily incorporated into my home-schooling program. Family, art, and music were the constant in my life."

At 13, a young Lights saved up to buy an 8-Track and start-

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ed producing her own music. Two years later, by chance, she met her would-be manager. "It's actually a funny story how that happened," she reveals. "I was modeling a shirt for a Walmart

flyer and the makeup artist on the shoot asked me to play something for him; he ended up passing my demo along to a friend of his and that friend became my manager." For the next

few years, the artist used her time to truly discover her sound. "It takes a long time," she says. "I finally landed on this lo-fi electronic sound which didn't really exist back then. At 18, I packed up my stuff and made the move to Toronto; things kind of took off from there."

After placing local ads to recruit band members, Lights put together a solid group of musicians and started doing shows. "In 2009, with just one EP out, I was up for and won Best New Artist at the JUNOs," she gushes. "It was such a nice accolade as an emerging artist in Canada and it just kept going from there. Now, I'm on my fourth record and am really just living the dream. I couldn't be happier to be doing what I love and to be releasing a project that combines both art and music." The album, due out September 22nd, wasn't an easy process for Lights, but will undoubtedly be worth the long nights she put in. "It's crazy what you can accomplish when you really put the work in," the singer says. "So many people shut themselves down before even trying and I know because I've done that in the past whenever I thought about combining an album with a comic book. I think people are always afraid of accomplishing something just because of the work that it would take to get there."

Though there have been a couple of instances where bands tried to combine the two (i.e.: My Chemical Romance), Lights' *Skin & Earth* is the first to do it so directly. "There are song lyrics right in the comic's dialogue,"

she says. “Each chapter title is the name of an album track and everything flows in a cohesive storyline. I’ve always wanted to see somebody do that and I finally decided I would have to be the one to do so. I think it gives fans a reason to really listen to the record in its entirety and it is sort of a reward for them for taking the time to listen to everything. There’s so much more to an album than just the few singles that end up on a Spotify playlist. *Skin&Earth* tells a story from beginning to end and there’s a lot that you’re able to explore.”

When speaking of what came first (the music or the comic?), Lights described the process of creation to be a very symbiotic one. “What kicked it off from day one was the story I had in mind,” she says. “I had a very basic idea of what I wanted it to be and so I would take those ideas into songwriting sessions and write a few songs about each major story moment. I knew there were certain emotions I wanted to convey and certain moods I wanted to be sure to infuse into it. As the songs were being written, more story ideas would pop up and I’d go back into that and add to it. In the end, I had about 60 songs written for the album. It was a bit of puzzle but when it was all done, I wrote out the story in-depth and, from that, created a story board and brought the comic to life. When I knew everything was chosen and finished, that’s when I started drawing.”

Originally planning on creating a 20-30 page issue,

*Skin&Earth* quickly became so much more. “The story grew to be more than what you could fit into just one issue,” Lights says. “There was just so much I wanted to say and the plan for one issue became a series of six. The creative process was so cool because it really showed me what I’m capable of; I never thought I’d actually be able to do this.” After creating it all on paper, Lights began to bring her vision to life with the release of the “Giants” music video, the album’s first single release. “Filming the video was so cool,” she shares. “It was actually really tricky to do because, although it’s the first single, it isn’t the first track on the album. There are things that happen in the video that you won’t really know about for a while and we couldn’t give too much of the story away.”

Having spent so much time crafting these characters and storylines, Lights made sure to be as hands-on as she could be with very aspect of the video. “I was really involved with the stylist, casting, and props department,” she says. “Walking onto the set was just bizarre and surreal because this world that I had created was actually coming to life.” Having released the comic’s first issue ahead of this year’s San Diego Comic Con, fans of Lights surprised her by attending SDCC in cosplay from *Skin&Earth*. “I didn’t know what to expect that day,” Lights says. “It was my first time attending the convention as a guest and I had a panel and signing scheduled that day, both of which ended up having an amazing

turnout. At that point, the first issue had only been out for a week and I was just blown away to see people dressed up as the character I had created.”

Lights’ project, a fairly new one in the music industry, has no template or rules to follow on how to release an album and comic in a way that people would understand its connection. “One of the challenging things was creating an album that didn’t necessarily need a comic and creating a comic that didn’t necessarily need an album,” she says. “They’re both intentionally meant to stand alone but when you put them together, they’re suddenly so much more. *Skin&Earth* can be absorbed in any way that you want but when you have both pieces of the puzzle, you get a whole new side to the music and a brand new perspective on the comic.”

As for what she’s hoping fans take away from the project, Lights’ mission is to make people feel empowered. “There’s actually a lot of commentary on environmental issues and depression in the comic,” she says. “That’s at the very root of the story and I think that’s important to talk about. My goal was to show the character overcoming her struggles and coming out the other side stronger. I really do believe that when we overcome something, whether externally or internally, we’re stronger for it. It’s all a part of our journey. What I love about modern comics is that you can confront these social issues without having to beat people over the head with it.” ■

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