

THY
KINGDOM
COME

by Tshepo Mokoena
Photos by Stevie Mada



Model wears dress, crown and earrings all by DOUÇE & GABBANA



Lorde wears blouse, skirt, blazer, and trench all by MOSCHINO, crown and earrings by DOUCE & GABBANA, bracelet by IOMI BINNS and bracelets by HOORS & MOUTES

Ella Yelich-O'Connor is teetering on the precipice of something big. During the week she unveiled her debut album, *Pure Heroine*, her break-out single, "Royals," topped Billboard's Digital Songs chart and five of its rock charts. Only pop mega-stars Miley Cyrus and Katy Perry sold more copies of their singles on Billboard's Hot 100 in the same week. And yet Yelich-O'Connor, more commonly known to fans as Lorde, is just 16.

Her ability to straddle both the pop and alternative worlds speaks volumes. Vocally, she's reminiscent of electropop singer Charli XCX's straightforward delivery and Jessie Ware's harmonic histrionics, backed by beats that producer Clams Casino or electronic trio Moderat could have crafted. As Lorde, she's placed herself in a world of contradictions: the songs she writes are catchy and succinct yet critical of the party-centric, money-obsessed lyrical content heard in the majority of Top 40 pop, hip hop, and electronic dance music. You might expect her to channel her critique of the state of pop music into tracks that are distinctly 'anti-pop.' But that's not what she's about.

"I think pop music is seen as shameful because of the nature of a lot of the subject matter," she says from her hotel in Seattle, where she's gearing up to headline a showcase gig at Decibel Festival. "But I like pop because it's gratifying and it's fun, and it's a world where everything seems okay. I love pop, and I think you can use that platform to your advantage and say things that are important. It doesn't have to be just stupid shit all the time, and that's what a lot of people don't realize."

Yelich-O'Connor understands that she shares space on the charts with the type of music she wants us to question. She first broadcast those ideas on *The Love Club*, the 2012 EP that transformed her from an unknown teenager of Auckland's North Shore suburbia into an online and radio sensation. The five-song record incorporates elements of hip hop bass, 90s R&B girl group vocals, and the sort of maddeningly addictive hooks that epitomize intelligently written pop.

The daughter of a poet, she's been raised to believe that words matter. After getting into Raymond Carver's short stories, she "realized the potency of small sentences and of minimalism with language. That was a big turning point for me," she continues, "and after that I think the way I wrote really changed. I think you can probably see that in how I write today."

Songs like "Ribz," about getting older and leaving adolescence behind, highlight how she deftly condenses a broad idea into the simple and recognizable form of a four-minute song. Similarly, when she sings "And I am only as young as the minute is, full of it / Getting pumped up on the little bright

things I bought" on "Tennis Court," she uses relatable language as a vehicle for complex ideas on being a teenager, and getting caught up in material concerns. She turns big ideas into digestible songs, working in line with the privilege and challenge of intellectualizing pop.

Thanks to a conscious decision to hold off on releasing any music until the time felt right—unlike Lana Del Rey, whom Lorde is most often compared to—Yelich-O'Connor seems to have appeared from nowhere. In reality, her backstory reads with more complexity than that. At 12, she sang Duffy's "Warwick Avenue" in her school's talent show, and somehow video footage from the night ended up in the hands of A&R scout Scott MacLachlan, at Universal Music New Zealand. She signed a development deal with them, and spent time learning about songwriting and how to mature as an artist. The long-term nurturing paid off.

Now, when she speaks, Yelich-O'Connor chooses her words with measured and delicate care, just as she does when co-writing music with producer Joel Little. The pair worked on both *The Love Club* and *Pure Heroine* together. At 15, Yelich-O'Connor

Ella's WILD Wish:
"I think hearing an orchestral
arrangement of one of my songs
would be so moving and cool."



Lorde wears blouse by MOSCHINO, gown by MARCHESA,
crown by DOLCE & GABBANA,
bracelets, rings and earrings by ALEXIS BITTAR

wrote the lyrics for every song. She carries the distinction like a point of pride, rendered especially relevant when you consider that most female artists her age work with huge teams of songwriters, or don't pen their own lyrics at all.

In past interviews, she's spoken about being taken seriously as a musician, and not "just being a singer." As Lorde, her voice is her instrument. After years of getting a hold on melody, chord progressions, and turning a bare refrain into an entire composition, her working relationship with Little complements both of their strengths.

"In the studio Joel is the technical one, because I don't really know how to use ProTools very well," she says, laughing in her low, throaty voice. "So he's the one making the beats. And I'm like, 'make the snare more dry,' 'swap that synth out for something dirtier.' It's me being a control freak."

It seems important for Yelich-O'Connor to have that creative control over her image too, particularly in how she's presented online. Unlike the stars that tend to post photos of the glamour and assumed opulence of their lives, Lorde prefers to keep it real. In May, the caption under her Instagram photo of a Subway sandwich bag jutting out over her feet read, "my card just declined buying subway that cost \$8."

"It's such a weird thing, this kind of constant curation," she says, of online personas. "I try to avoid that, because I think people in pop have these lives which are viewed as unattainable. And here I am, like, a kid from New Zealand, have never traveled before, have never had more than \$300 in my bank account."

While that may not be the case for much longer, Yelich-O'Connor says she cares more about expressing herself in song than tweeting her way through every living moment or airbrushing her experiences. She knows the press can't get enough of how young she is, but she doesn't want it to detract from her work.

"I don't make music and think the whole time, *Oh my gosh, I'm 16. I just make music.*"

Stylist: Johannah Lawhorne @ The Magnet Agency
Hair: Taylor: Kirsten Heikkola for Colestine Agency
Make Up artist: Joe Baker @ The Magnet Agency
using Guerlain
Photographer's assistant: Loren Dierham

Lorde wears: top, shoes, crown and earrings all by DOUGUE GABBANA