

Relight Our Fire

From Sunday Girl to Ye-Ye Girl via Britain's best hip-hop producers: the remarkable reinvention of Whinnie Williams

WHINNIE WILLIAMS

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Career reinventions are a risky business. Some pay off dividends - like Katy Perry, originally marketed as Katy Hudson, the blonde Christian Rock singer. Or Lana Del Rey, who made her musical debut as the virtually unrecognisable and much less saucy Lizzy Grant. Others simply confuse - see Snoop Dogg coming back as... Snoop Lion. I've yet to understand what that's about. Either way, a reinvention will rarely go unnoticed and will almost certainly be judged. So here we are with Whinnie Williams - the artist formerly known as Sunday Girl - who after a year's silence is back, with bigger, blonder hair and a poodle for a side kick. Her vision? To work alongside Britain's best hip hop producers while creating an artist persona inspired by the 60s.

Whinnie - named after the first-born men in her family - has a career trajectory that reads all too familiar within the music industry in its current state, a disappointing

tale of too many cooks spoiling the broth. She changed labels twice after Geffen closed shop, but despite eventually releasing three singles through Polydor - most notably, "Stop Hey" - and supporting Ellie Goulding and LMFAO on tour, the Sunday Girl project was dropped the same week Whinnie bought a new flat and a puppy. I look at Whinnie in disbelief, imagining that nightmare scenario unfolding, but she breezily describes it as "the best thing. I spent the year writing songs, doing up my flat and having fun with Brian (her grey toy poodle who now features in all of Whinnie's videos)". "I did the Sunday Girl stuff for quite a few years," she explains, "but I was young and new in the industry and all my stuff got watered down a lot. Everyone's ideas and what they think it should be gets pushed upon it. It wasn't what I wanted to be doing - it went in a

completely different direction." While you get a feeling that there are genuinely no hard feelings from Whinnie, inevitably comparisons with the before and after of Sunday Girl recur throughout the interview. "I feel like the Sunday Girl thing was a really expensive practice run. Now I get to do it how I want, with a really strong narrative."

Whinnie took a year off and retreated to her dad's caravan in the coastal town of Hastings, which has since become the focal point for the "Whinnie Williams project". "I've got this obsession with Paris, so it's almost like Hastings meets Paris. Whinnie is like a French lady that lives in a caravan who wears Chanel suits and jelly shoes. Quite chic, but really tacky...I love that meeting of two really different vibes". The aesthetic is clearly an exaggerated portrayal of Whinnie's real life - "if you was to come to my house there are beautiful antiques along with proper shitty





JACKET / Vivetta
SKIRT / Karen Millen
SOCKS / Topshop
SHOES / Melissa
EARRINGS / Liz Mendez
NECKLACE / Pebble London
RING / Pebble London
RING / Pranela



WHINNIE WILLIAMS

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tacky stuff. My whole life is a mix of the two things". Years back, when I interviewed Whinnie as Sunday Girl, she told me that her dream would be to get a poodle and wear tailored suits (preferably Chanel) all day. It seems like this project is living out that fantasy. The music video for her debut track "You Don't Love Me" tells the story of Whinnie's poodle, Brian, falling in love with a French Bull Dog. "I've had that idea for years! I finally actually got to do it." Before being snapped up as a singer, Whinnie was studying for an art degree, but "wasn't able to utilize that with a major". Now she writes all her video treatments, and her friends shoot them with her. The result is impressive. Inspired by Wes Anderson, the videos that have been put out thus far truly evoke the Whinnie that Whinnie is describing. Whinnie's face doesn't even appear in the video - although we do catch a glimpse of the Chanel-inspired suits that she is donning. As she says, "I'm done with prancing about and trying to look nice in music videos that don't mean anything. Like, whatever".

The song itself is a sparkly, light-hearted romantic ditty, with Whinnie's lilting, fluttery vocals reminiscent of Lily Allen on *Alright, Still*. As with the videos, the Whinnie sound is "so precise", due to the fact that

before she was writing songs with different people every day of the week, which, in her opinion, didn't make sense. These songs are inspired by Françoise Hardy, Bridget Bardot and a host of 60s girl bands, as well as The Cardigans. "My songs are going to be so sickly sweet but quite dark as well. There will be a lyric in there that will make your ears prick up and be like, 'did she just say that?!'" Having been friends with the Manchester production duo Future Cut (Nicole Scherzinger, Professor Green, Shakira) for years, they started working on some tracks and "it totally clicked. It explained the whole story to them and they totally back it. So now I'm totally in control." She has since signed to their label.

In person, Whinnie is beautiful - very model-esque, all limbs and big hair (although I partly put that down to her live-in hairdresser boyfriend). It is no wonder that as Sunday Girl she was adopted by the fashion pack and became a regular on the *Party Pages*. This time around, though, I'd be surprised to see Whinnie out being snapped quite so much. "I think I've

learnt that I should stick to the music for a while and just establish myself in what I'm doing". She reflects that it was probably more of a distraction than anything else. "If fashion stuff happens it happens, but I don't want to go to loads of parties anymore. I'm so involved in my work at the moment".

Her next single, "Break Hearts In Your Sleep" reflects on the mistakes one makes as a teen. "That's what I want the album to be about. These songs are saying it's alright to fuck up, don't worry about it - we all do it". This will be accompanied by a new addition to the "Just Popped Out For A Pint Of Milk" sessions, in which Whinnie covers modern classics, "set to the backdrop of pool, pints of flat lager and a blossoming dance floor romance". Are there any live shows coming up, I ask, remembering how Whinnie had previously suffered such crippling stage fright that her mother had to take her to a hypnotist. "Yes, we're rehearsing in my garden at the moment," she tells me, totally unfazed. "In my year off I learnt guitar so I'm playing guitar. As we do more gigs I really want to get an accordion player". What's the gig? "Yes, our first live gig will be in Hyde Park, on the night of the Rolling Stones' show". Oh right, so no biggie then.