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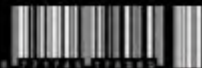


**BREE
RUNWAY**
WEARS NIKE AIR MAX VERONA

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ISSUE 87



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P123



GO APESHIT FOR THE SELF-DESCRIBED “FLAMINGO IN A WORLD FULL OF PIGEONS”, BREE RUNWAY IS THE DESTRUCTIVE POP HACKNEY GAL READY TO RULE YOUR WORLD

Bree Runway's voice is laced with gravel. She's been yelling and shouting and "ugly crying" after the release of "APESHIT", her genre-skating track that hurtled onto the internet via a video featuring falling limbs and flaming cars. We're chatting over apple juice in a low lit hotel bar in her native London. Bree, a ball of joy and designer clothes. One week later and there'd have been calls from everyone in earshot to plunge ourselves into self-isolation. But for now, we're enjoying simpler times, while human interaction still exists and the worst byproduct of her tired voice is that she can't do her Shakira impression (her astoundingly accurate Lady Gaga one is on Instagram for your listening pleasure).

"It's been the wildest release week for me," Bree gushes. She doesn't mean the celebrations, though there was probably a fair bit of that. It's the reception that hit different this time. "Usually there's traction, there's a fan interest, intrigue," she says. But this time, views skyrocketed, tweets viralized and co-signs flooded in. Kojey Radical announced that "Bree Runway is gonna take over the world". Doja Cat ordered everyone to "WATCH APESHIT BY @breeunway NOW". Even Missy Elliot—whose early music videos are nodded to in "APESHIT" via a fisheye lense, and whose name Bree cites as a formative inspiration—gave Bree a follow. "It just feels insane to be seen," Bree says of it all. "Like, that seen."

It won't be the last time Bree Runway graces the lips of a great, nor was it the first. That honour is bestowed to Michelle Obama. Backtrack a few years and Bree was a "creative yet troublesome" student growing up in Hackney, one who "definitely wasn't tuned in to anything that required 100 million brain cells." Despite excelling at science, she decided it was a bit of a boring career prospect, and immersed herself in music instead. If the music room wasn't open, Bree wasn't going to school. "Bye. Literally, I'm gone," she laughs. "I didn't really care about anything else." Like any early MTV-obsessed kid, she formed a girl group, while her mum—"our Tina Knowles"—made them matching snakeskin outfits

for the school talent show. "Did we even have a name?", she pauses. "I think it was called, The Girls, or something." Bree brushes it off as comically on-the-nose, but it's quite fitting for her: no bullshit, to the point.

Then Michelle Obama came to school, and Bree sang her the aptly-titled "I'm Going All The Way," by Minnesotan ensemble Sounds of Blackness. "Whatever it takes," she trills across the table, "I'm going all the way." Bree was singled out by Michelle, who should consider adding A&R to her lengthy CV. "She basically said, 'You actually have no choice. You have to do this.' And I was like, ok! I will!" Bree talks about it as part of a much bigger picture, one that could well be immortalised in a shiny book one day and read to her grandkids. "It's kind of like it's all been written, this moment and more," she says. "The story that's going to become part of this huge story."

Not one to rest on laurels or liberal praise, Bree decided to study music production at college, where she wrote a "stupid song" about an ex. She spent her first paycheck from a retail job on a £200 home studio setup; her next £200 on a music video for the track, hiring a team to shoot it off of Guntree. "Don't wish and sit," she advises. "Wish and work." Silly though the track may seem to her now, it got the ball rolling, helping her figure out how to translate ideas into action. "I was like, okay, this is actually my process," she explains. "I need to continue doing this." So she did, making a couple EPs from a bedroom studio.

But while she had the method on lock, her indefinable sound took a little longer. "I felt like the music I was making was cool," she says of her early output. "But it wasn't the correct sound. I was making it because that's what's expected of me as a black girl," she notes, highlighting the industry's impulse to pigeonhole black female artists into R&B and soul. "I was kind of living in a box that's been built around us, that when we come out as musicians they expect us to be in these parameters and I'm just like..." She pulls a face—not a happy one.

STYLING: MICHAELE FERRI
 MAKEUP: JESSICA HARRIS
 HAIR: JESSICA HARRIS
 DRESS: MICHAELE FERRI
 SHOES: MICHAELE FERRI

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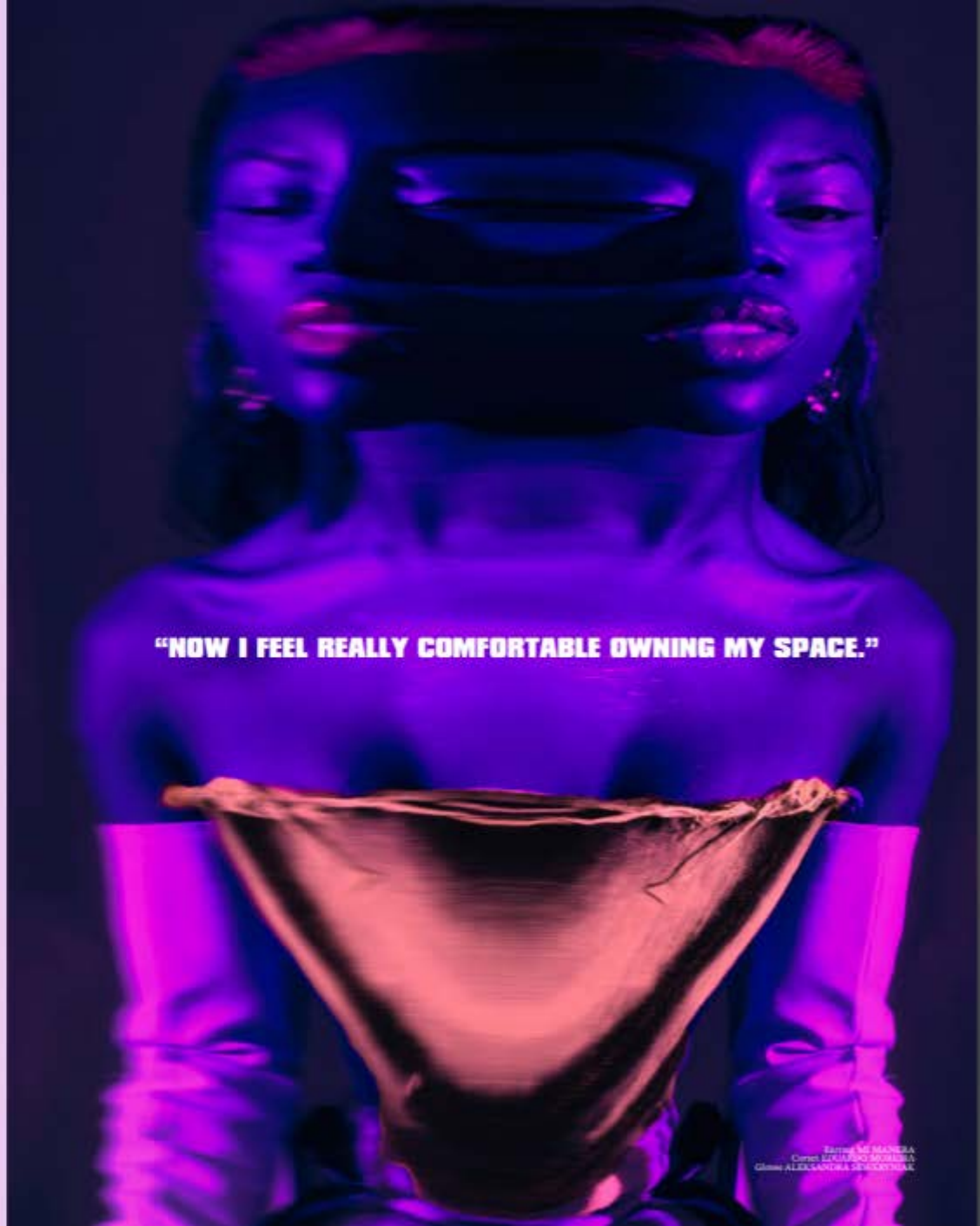


Swimsuit JO WAINERS
Tights JET SET
Shoes L'ETRE FOUR GLADIOS
Boutique FOLK





Stylizzata da ARGENTINA LEITNER
Trucco da SANDRA
Capelli da MAX VERGNA



"NOW I FEEL REALLY COMFORTABLE OWNING MY SPACE."

Stylizzata da MANERA
Capelli da LUIGI MARIANI
Gioielli da ALESSANDRA DE CARVALHO

"I DON'T WANT TO BE JUST A GIRL THAT DRESSES REALLY GOOD AND MAKES A SICK SONG."

Bree doesn't want to be shoeboxed into a neat little sonic square. She's currently set herself a challenge of experimenting with two genres a week—over the weekend she messed with R&B and dance; next she's toying with some Latin elements. "But where it's authentic to me," she states. "I'm not a try-hard artist at all. I always go in and combine the elements together; make it as me as possible." So, after deciding to diversify from her early EPs, she dropped *What Do I Tell My Friends* in 2017. It's a masterclass in switching things up—a pop banger that spans soft piano and pulsing dance beats.

All Bree's music videos are essentially festival-worthy short films, one she has a huge hand in: "My references and ideas for a video range from 10 to 27 pages." Aesthetically brilliant, they also tend to involve a tongue-in-cheek political take, as *What Do I Tell My Friends* proves. Released amidst the #MeToo movement, the video shows her being sexually harassed by a creepy white male photographer. It's tough to watch, until she flips the narrative and—spoiler alert—ultimately kills him, writhing over his dead body in the same way he straddled her (albeit with much more coordination).

"I just feel like black women—we're so degraded, but fetishized at the same time," she says. "They hate us, but they want us. It's every love-hate thing with us and our complexion," adding, "Men can be so nasty when they know they can take you to another level. I just wanted to make girls feel like..." She pauses, laughing. "You don't actually have to kill them. But there are ways of coming out on top in those situations."

The track struck a chord, landing Bree a major label deal, and reminding her to follow her gut. "You gotta listen to yourself," she says. "You gotta listen to yourself." That's exactly what she did with her 2019 EP, *Be Breezy*, a slick exploration of her newfound creative confidence. Sharp bars are sliced with a gliding chorus on "DON." The guitar-driven "All Night" deserves a prime spot on your sex playlist. "X3C"'s PC-esque distortion sounds a bit like a fembotte simultaneously breaking down and teaching orgasm. The EP also features Brooke Candy, after the two met in a studio through Ashnikko and bonded over bosbs. "She starts bouncing her tits to me and I started bouncing my tits back," she grins. "We just clicked instantly." Then they all went to Shoreditch House and toasted to their friendship with mac 'n' cheese and champagne.

Bree concocts music like the rat from *Ratatouille* perfecting his Michelin-level brew, balancing a dash of this, with a splash of that, until it all sings. "I have to overlook and then strip back," she explains. "Before I submit a song for mix, I'm always like, 'Where is a window for change? Where is a window for a beat switch here? Where is a window where we can introduce a new genre?'" Her reference pool is limitless: she counts Lady Gaga as a top inspiration and bucket list collaborator ("The video would be sickening") and the jewels of early 2000s MTV as inspiration—Kerli, Britney, Busta Rhymes, Plarrrell. Then there's "a lot of Highlife music, 'cause I'm from Ghana," she explains. Her dad put her on the rhythm-heavy beats when she was young, and it's why she's so inclined to include live instruments in her work, whether that's drums, piano, or that electric guitar shredding its way through "APESHIT".

"APESHIT" itself is both the launchpad of next-level Bree and her final form. "I've reinvented myself so many times now, this version of me is like the version," she says. Extolling the virtues of going wild and stupid, the track was inspired by a YouTube commenter who thought Bree was a bit too much for them—before coming to their senses and realizing that,

actually, maybe they just weren't enough for Bree. "It's a middle finger to [those] who always have shit to say to unproblematic people living their best lives," she explains. "Just because you're not confident enough to do it, doesn't mean you need to shit on the other person that is."

The Internet's notoriously toxic comments section is one of the reasons Bree started therapy last year. "Before therapy, seeing a negative comment about me... I would literally talk about it the whole day," she sighs. She's also brutally tough on herself. "*The Evening Standard* couldn't critique me worse than I critique myself," she smirks. Her tendency for self-sabotage stems from years of bullying when she was younger, and she's talked openly about her experiences with colourism (discrimination faced by darker-skinned black people). It's why she's working with her therapist to "silence the child that was bullied," especially as she sturms into the ring of fame. "One thing that was really sad growing up was I never felt confident enough to celebrate myself, because of how bullies made me feel. If I achieved something musically at school, I would be like, 'ok, stop talking, it's going to bring attention to me,'" she explains. "But now I feel really comfortable owning my space."

"I get a lot of messages from young black girls like, 'Oh my god, your story about colourism is so relatable, it's happening now,'" she says. It's why, determined to give back, one day she wants to start some sort of anti-bullying foundation. Until then, she's using her platform and music to send the message. "I don't want to be just a girl that dresses really good and makes a sick song," she says. "I want to bring awareness to certain issues: about women being underpaid, about black people being underpaid in work." Her video for "Big Racks" is a case in point. It opens with cold hard facts about the discrimination ethnic minorities face in the workforce; that 57% "feel they have to work harder to succeed in a British workplace," or that "black workers in the UK earn 23.1% less on average than white workers." Bree points out that the creative industries can be one of the worst spaces: "Black influencers get paid the least, and most times—no offence—they can bring the best content."

She's hopeful change is underway, pointing to Edward Enninful's appointment as editor of *British Vogue* and the shift he's creating from within, as well as Rihanna's boundary-smashing, Victoria Secret-cancelling Fenty collections. In the music sphere, Dija Cut's ability to cross genres and still connect resonates deeply with her. Then there's Lizzo's stratospheric ascent, which is "really, really comforting" to Bree. "It has taken her a long time to get there, of course—she's a black woman. But she's there. And it feels great to see it."

You get the sense that Bree isn't far behind. And when she gets there, she'll be celebrating with lobster—her sign of "ahhh, I've had a really good day today." Lobster, and gifting herself designer treats (her post-"APESHIT" present? A pair of Givenchy boots). She is, after all, the queen of vintage fits, though if she tells me where she finds them she'll have to kill me, which is fair.

Her top three designers are Chanel, Jean Paul Gaultier and Thierry Mugler, and if Bree Runway could walk any actual runway, it'd be Mugler's: "Maybe he can create looks for me for my own runway at my sold-out arena shows." In the meantime, she plans on hitting us with disparate singles ("I even have a rock song") plus a big mixtape ("I just decided that this morning"). And, of course, her Shakira impression, which she promises me she's dropping a video of soon. We'll be holding this she-wolf to that.



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