



Grimes

Goth, hyena, dragon, grounded, free, flying. We catch Grimes for a fleeting second in her constant transformation.

WORDS ANNE FULLERTON PHOTOS BEC LORRIMER

Grimes has the kind of mythology that most musicians build up over the course of a career rather than at the start of one. This is less because of a zealous PR agent and more because, by her own admission, Claire Boucher likes to “do crazy things”. The ill-fated trip down the Mississippi River on a homemade houseboat, the unfinished neuroscience degree, the hermit grandparents who taught her to shoot a gun at the age of eight and the music videos that reference medieval Catholic painters alongside Britney Spears have all helped make her one of the buzz artists of 2012. Well, that and her knack for taking a bunch of sounds we know by heart, a bunch of sounds we’ve never heard and stitching them all together to make a musical Frankenstein that is as hypnotic as it is entirely her own.

When we speak to 24-year-old Boucher, it’s 8.20 on a Tuesday evening in NYC and she’s hanging out on her publicist’s couch, which also happens to be her bed at the moment. “This is the first thing I’m doing today. I went to bed at noon, so I got up really late. My publicist’s office is empty at night so I just go there and record all night.” She sounds very chipper for someone who’s only had three hours of sleep. “It’s pretty fun,” she says. “Because I know I have to go on tour for four months, I’m very energetic about recording.” This may be the case, but she seems equally energetic about almost everything else too – whether describing the injustice of a teenage grounding or psychoanalysing her enduring love of Lisa ‘Left Eye’ Lopes.

I was worried we weren’t going to be able to get hold of you because I saw on Twitter that you’re quitting mobile phones and email. This is actually my publicist’s phone, I refuse to use phones. I just really don’t like talking to people when it’s not in real life. I have a hard time communicating with people and I just want to do things in real life. Like, I don’t want to answer emails all day. I could just literally answer emails and talk on the phone all day if I did everything everyone wanted me to do, so I just decided to stop engaging with those things so I could work on stuff.

But you’re still on Twitter? Twitter is different because it’s just me saying what I think at the world. It’s more of a creative thing. It’s a tool, like if I think something’s important or I want to promote a band, want to contact someone or something, Twitter is good for that. It’s just this one source where you can get everything but you’re not wasting time answering emails from people from high school you haven’t spoken to.

Do you come from a creative background? My parents aren’t very creative, like my dad’s an accountant and stuff, so most of the things in my life I’ve done as a reaction to my parents and my upbringing. I was brought up Catholic in a very strict household. I feel so many of the ways I self-define have been reactionary to that. I’m very for people doing what they want and being free.

Are you conscious of that in interviews? You seem to talk pretty openly about drugs. Of course I care what my parents think but we’ve had our big talks where they got really mad at me about stuff. I’m going to say what I want to say in interviews, although I



definitely don’t want to be like “I do tons of drugs” or something – I mean I don’t do tons of drugs – but I wouldn’t want to encourage younger people to think that taking drugs is important for making music or something. That’s a reason why I would potentially censor myself, but not for my parents.

How do you get along now? There was a while where I think they were just confronting their daughter being in the media. I am really bad at censoring myself and I do crazy things. I think I did some things they didn’t know about that came out in the media. This time I was assaulted, or there’s a picture of me online kissing a girl. They just freaked out about it because they’d never heard about it because I don’t talk to them about stuff like that. But I think now it’s a bit more chill because they’ve come to terms with the way that it is. I think it’s better for it.

Is there a particular fight you remember as the big one? Oh yeeeeeah. Marilyn Manson played in Vancouver where I grew up when I was like 14 or 15. God! I just wanted to go so bad and all of my friends were going. I got a ticket and they just grounded me. My parents were like, “You can not go to Marilyn Manson.” They wouldn’t let me leave the house. I still feel really angry about that. You know, I never saw Marilyn Manson and 2003 – that’s, like, a really good era. I’m still angry. I can’t speak about it [laughs].

Sometimes you remember the outrage of not going more than you would have remembered the actual event. I think it depends what it is. Marilyn Manson would’ve been the pinnacle of my life at that point [laughs].

I read that your mum was a comic book publisher and you’re a visual artist too. Were you interested in comics? That’s a loaded question because basically I was really into comics when I was younger, graphic novels and stuff like that, and she worked at a publishing company that did more literature stuff. She came up to me and was like, “What’s hip, what’s cool, what’s new?” I was like, “Graphic novels and manga.” Then she started up this [comic book] publishing company. I was like, “What the fuck?” So then I quit comic books. I really should not be talking like this. My mum is actually really cool. These are just the worst stories, you know. Teenage embitterment. It was hard especially because she published Avril Lavigne comics. Avril Lavigne was like my enemy at the time. When you’re a kid and you’re a goth, everyone thinks you like Avril Lavigne because you kind of look like her or whatever. You’re constantly compared to this person you want nothing to do with and then your mum takes up a career that is directly involved with her merch line? [laughs] We also had to go to Comic-Con every year, which is actually really fun, but my mum was like, “You can never ever say anything bad about





Avril Lavigne," and probably 10 times a day, someone would be like, "Wow, you must be so happy that your mum works with Avril Lavigne." I had to just grind my teeth and say, [deadpan] "Yes. I'm very happy."

You wrote recently on Twitter that you can feel your spirit animal changing. [Laughs] Yeah, I don't know! It's sort of a joke, but it's kind of serious. I like the idea of identifying with an animal based on its characteristics. I often look at people and like to think about if you were an animal what would you be? Or if you were a Simpsons character what would you be?

What's your spirit animal at the moment? A dragon. I was born in the year of the dragon but I identified as a hyena. But now I think I'm a dragon.

What was it like growing up in Vancouver? It was a really cool city when I was growing up because there's a pretty awesome scene musically. It hadn't had the crazy economic boom yet so it was a lot cheaper to live in. Skinny Puppy are from Vancouver and Dandi Wind and Petroleum By-Product and the Mutators, so there actually are a lot of really good goth and punk bands from Vancouver that played often. I was really into music. If you weren't popular you would go to shows and there was a lot of space for that, especially all-ages shows, which is really neat. Now that I'm older I rarely play all-ages shows. People don't like to put them on because you can't sell alcohol. It's a beautiful city, it's on the water. It was tough because I was really unpopular but there were lots of good things too. But I had to leave. It's the place I grew up in so I couldn't stay there.

If unpopular kids went to shows, what did popular kids do? I think the popular kids had parties I wasn't invited to [laughs]. You know, they all had cars because they usually had more money, they would go shopping, there were always car rallies and stuff like that. Then the weird kids would go to shows instead.

You put out a line of pretty attention-grabbing rings a little while ago. How did that come about? Well, uh, I guess we were running out of T-shirts! And I don't want Grimes to be a typical band. Grimes has always just been an art project. I do a lot in the videos, I do all the artwork, it's a lot more than music and I didn't just want to be another band with a bunch of stupid T-shirts. I also want to employ my friends. As much as possible I try to employ my friends, whether it's dancing on stage or working on the videos or whatever. My friend Morgan Black is just this crazy guy who lives in a meat locker and he owns all his own equipment and just makes the craziest stuff. I already had vagina rings from him, and I was like, it'd just be a real statement to release merch that instead of being a T-shirt was just a vagina on a knuckle ring. On



one hand it was aesthetically beautiful, it was employing local artists and getting their name out there, and it's desexualising a really sexualised object. Especially being a woman in this industry, I think I like to play with ideas of female sexualisation in the music industry. It's a really interesting topic and I'm constantly trying to subvert or make people think about [it]. And I also feel that people are just scared of vaginas. It seems like something that shouldn't be scary. It's not gross, it's a normal and beautiful thing, and so I thought having it on your hand is quite a statement and that would be a cool thing to do.

And you sell them at shows. Are they popular? Yeah, I mean they're kind of expensive because they're expensive to make. It's not like we can get them all mass-produced like a T-shirt. Morgan has to make them by hand, one by one, so it's intensive. They're 25 bucks, which is kind of expensive. I think people are kind of scared of them. I bring them to shows and everyone looks at them but a lot of people feel weird about actually having them. One guy bought one and proposed to his wife at the show. That's really cool.

That is cool! Why does your friend live in a meat locker? It's an old meat locker. In Montreal a lot of people choose to live in the old industrial area because there used to be a lot of industry there and then there was this kind of economic fallout, so a lot of people I know live in textile factories. He lives in this weird creepy basement that used to be a meat locker, like a freezer where they would keep dead animals that they would slaughter upstairs.

That sounds like a terrible place to spend winter. I think everyone in Montreal is just cold all the time. I kind of want to move to New York. I really love Montreal but it's very cold. I got frostbite last year. I got frostbite the last two years in a row. I don't know if I can handle that again so I might take a little break from Montreal.

Are you excited about heading to Japan? I'm really obsessed with anime so I'm very, very, very excited. Apparently there's this place you can go and pay like 10 bucks and they just have thousands of cats, and you can just go pet cats. I really want to do that. I want to go to Shibuya, all the famous places.

You're into K-Pop, what do you like about it? I just really like how creepily mechanical it is. There's something really dark about the whole thing. It's like there's this hyper-corporate bubblegum image and beneath that a lot of them aren't even making very much money and they have to work so hard, there's this dark underbelly of K-Pop. Beyond that, the songs are just really good and the art direction is always amazing. It pulls off the bubblegum thing in a way that's a lot more tasteful than how a lot of American bands do it. They're better at pulling off cute. In Vancouver there's a huge Asian population. At my high school more than 50 per cent of people had English as a second language so I was just exposed to it at a very young age. I was really into J-pop and J-Rock in high school, and then when I went to university I got into K-pop.

Do you have a favourite K-Pop band? I love Big Bang and G-Dragon – he's the ultimate star. I feel like G-Dragon and 2NE1 are badass. Girls' Generation is good but they're more cutesy.

Has your crowd changed since you became more popular?

Yeah, originally I used to play noise festivals and warehouse parties and my crowd would always be metalheads and kids who were into punk. Now my audience is really young girls and I have a large gay following, which is cool. I'd say my shows are 65 per cent girls maybe. That's interesting because in the beginning it was 90 per cent men. I feel like I'm not bound to anything musically so it can really appeal to lots of different people.

Have your parents been to a gig? I invited them both to Jimmy Fallon. They actually saw me open for Skrillex in Vancouver which was really funny. They thought it was cool. My dad loved Skrillex. My dad's like, "Wow! He's really good!"

Do you think people have any misconceptions about you? I think that a lot of people listen to the music I make and think that it's pastichey or meaningless and I think that's really untrue. There's a big Stereogum article about how my music is really cold and robotic and meaningless.

Do you read your press? I usually don't, I actually only read that because people kept bringing it up with me and I was like, what's this thing that everyone's talking about? I think it's good to just not know. I've stopped reading blogs altogether because I don't want to make music that just sounds like what everyone's making. In the past I've been able to do that because I've just been totally out of the loop with what's current, you're not in danger of following a trend. I get very influenced by what I listen to so I should definitely not listen to hip music.

Would you want to work on that kind of scale? Yeah. I'll do anything I think. One of the aims of humanity is leaving a legacy and I would never compromise artistically ever for success or fame, but I think the more that you can have a voice, that's a really cool thing. You're leaving stuff in the world for people to find once you're dead. That's something that appeals to me about mass media, but at the same time I think a lot of people do have to change their art if they want to be there, and that's something that I couldn't do.

What would you want your legacy to be? I'd like to be powerful and uncompromising and I like the idea of just constantly working on new shit. I don't want to settle with a sound or an aesthetic. I feel like my generation is not so much about the content as the means of consuming it. Before the internet you'd read a book and you'd have information and you'd use that information to do whatever – be a doctor. You'd memorise stuff. Now there's so much information and it's so easy to get. For me it's not so much about having a song and showing that song down people's throats, it's about the practice of making that song, doing something that works for me, and then letting that go.



UNLIKELY MUSICAL LOVES

So you're only listening to things that are uncool at the moment?

Yeah, I'm listening to a lot of country music and I'm really obsessing over Chris Isaak. You know that song 'Wicked Games'? That is so, so beautiful, but it is anti-everything that's cool right now.

What are your other influences? I'll just take anything. Even music I don't like, I can usually find something in it that's interesting. My biggest influences are more ethical, practical influences. I really respect certain artists more for the way they've approached their career than their music. Someone like TLC or Beyoncé are women who have done a really good job with their careers, always having integrity about presenting themselves as super dominating, creative forces. They make weird experimental music, 'Single Ladies' is actually a really weird song, but Beyoncé always does interesting things. She's not stuck in an idea. She's consistent, while also doing a bunch of really different things. That's something I would cite more as an influence than like, I'm really into this band for this song they wrote. Sorry I'm rambling.

TLC

Lisa 'Left Eye' Lopes is one of my all-time icons. And TLC is one of my favourite groups of all time. I have the same tattoo as Lisa on my hand. I think TLC in so many ways are groundbreaking. They have the weirdest production, but more than anyone else they're just so present in personality. They're one of the few bands that you can actually relate to as people. You see what they're doing and what they're singing about and you're like, I could be your friend. And I think that's really neat. Because I can love Tool or Fugazi but I'm so alienated culturally from them. There are no girls in those groups at all, whereas TLC I'm like yeah, totally.

ENYA

I feel like people don't take Enya seriously enough because everyone's parents played Enya in 2001. Everyone thinks Enya is super lame but Enya is actually super groundbreaking. That's another thing I've really been wanting to incorporate, the whole Celtic music and Sarah McLachlan influences that happened in the early 2000s. I think there's a lot of really beautiful stuff there.

JUSTIN BIEBER

I used to be a really big fan and I still think he makes good music [but] he's kind of annoying. I like the idea of pop music, it makes people feel good, and I cannot help but be impressed by the fact that he's so young and he's doing this on a level that's thirty thousand times as big as what I'm doing. He's doing an incredibly difficult thing, playing Madison Square Garden when you're 16 – that is the most impressive thing ever. Regardless of what you think about his music or image, that's pretty cool.

Grimes is playing Meredith Festival and sideshows in December. ⚡

