



NEW ROMANTIC

Florence Welch chats about life on the road, Kaiser Karl and her secretarial ambitions.

WORDS ANNE FULLERTON

It's hard to write an introduction to Florence Welch that doesn't feel redundant. Everyone and their dad already knows who she is and can probably sing most of her lyrics. A debut record that went platinum in the UK, Ireland and Australia, an electric stage presence and a gig at the Oscars have all contributed to the rise and rise of the Florence and the Machine frontwoman, earning her a loyal legion of "Flombies" along the way. You know you're properly famous when even your legs, impossibly flamingo-esque though they are, have their own YouTube homage. But still, Welch seems remarkably relaxed about the release of the second album. "I put myself through such hell on the first record and the pressure was so extreme, I don't think that anything could be worse than that," she says. "This one seemed almost easier, to be honest." Traversing love and death, sex and science in her typically epic brand of pop, *Ceremonials* may have been easier, but is certainly no less ambitious, than its predecessor.

So, first things first. What can we expect from the new record?

I think when we started [working on it], there was a sort of ethereal, chemical, elemental theme. I find that you can't really help being attracted to the themes that you are, so I always go back to the woods, I always get fixated on the flesh and the conflict in myself.

You recently did a shoot with Karl Lagerfeld. What was he like?

He's amazing! He's such a great guy, just the way his brain works. Talking to him is always so interesting. Every time I see him he ends up giving me some amazing book. He gave me a Helmut Newton photography book. He does all his shoots inside his book store, so he always says, "Oh you must see this". He's really warm and makes you feel really at ease. He's a great guy to hang out with.

How would you describe your own sense of style? I don't know, I grew up going to a lot of squat parties and lots of fancy dress stores and thrift stores. On tour, I've picked up lots of batwing

capas mixed with black lace and chiffon. I've definitely got quite a romantic sense of style, it's quite theatrical. On stage you get to dress in dream clothes for a bit. I've always loved vintage clothes and that old, romantic aesthetic.

Always? Have you been through any phases you'd rather forget?

Oh yeah! I went through a terrible grunge phase and I had blue hair and a henna tattoo on my arm and was wearing trainers. I've had blue hair, black hair. I had blonde hair for a while, which wasn't really such a great look on me. I've been every colour, but I always come back to red. It's the one I feel comfortable with.

Where do you get your costumes? I have a great stylist, Aldene Johnson. She's really good at getting in touch with new designers and the more high-end, couture stuff for stage. When we're travelling we'll go to vintage stores in New York or LA. We once rescued this dress from the basement of this vintage store and had it restored before we played at Somerset House. This beautiful chiffon dress sort of came to life on stage. The chiffon was so light, it was as if the dress was doing a performance of its own because it was happy to be out of the basement and sort of celebrating. We also collaborate with designers like Hannah Marshall and work together with them on the shapes of the dresses. Whether it should have a detachable cape is usually the question! For every day, I just go vintage. I'm a big Topshop fan as well.

What do you always take on tour? I like to take a lot of shawls and scarves, and a scented candle wherever I am to decorate the hotel room. Hotel rooms can be so sterile and they don't take up much space, so if you bring a few pretty scarves you can make somewhere look nice very easily. I really like Diptyque candles.

Do you enjoy touring? I do, actually. I like living out of a suitcase and the freedom that that brings. The first few days are always really hard. I always get a bit down. But once you get into it it's completely addictive. It's just such an amazing experience once you start appreciating it and stop missing home.

You're an art school dropout. What was the last thing you drew? I think everything creatively has gone into this record, but I do like to draw and I keep a sketchbook, an illustrated diary, which I might try and do again. I'm just constantly thinking about drum patterns now instead of colour palettes. Me and my boyfriend have got into a weird habit of sketching each other when we're bored in the evening. We'll just draw funny little pictures of each other. I think it's probably a picture of him. If you draw a picture of each other every now and again it forms a really weird record of your relationship. I wonder if you could analyse them, like if you were slightly annoyed at each other maybe the pictures come

out differently. I don't know, I've never enforced drawing time when we're having an argument. Maybe instead of fighting we could bring out the pencils.

What did you want to be when you were growing up? I wanted to be a zoologist slash secretary. I grew up late '80s and early '90s and I think towards the end of the '80s there was still a kind of glamour about being a secretary. I think it was just that movie with Dolly Parton in it, *9 to 5*.

What's always on your bedside table? My bed is actually completely surrounded by books. It's like I've built a fort. I'm reading this book called *One on One* by Craig Brown. He's a satirist but he's written a book of meetings between 101 people, so like Marilyn Monroe meets Khrushchev and they're all connected. Each one's like a tiny pocket of a biography.

Have you ever been to a clairvoyant? No I haven't. I don't think I'd like to go, for fear of what they might say.

Do you have any pets? I have a cat that is terribly strong-willed and will only allow herself to be patted when she feels like it, Mao.

What animal would you like to be reincarnated as? A tiger. I love tigers. They were always my favourite animal when I was a kid. I was just devastated about the state of their existence and how close they were to extinction. I'd cry about it all the time as a kid. I still get quite upset about it now, actually.

That's very dark for a kid! I was the most dark kid ever. You know when you find out that the world is expanding and that it'll fold in on itself and that will be the end of existence? That freaked me out. I cried for days because the world was coming to an end.

What do you usually order at a bar? I've got really into dirty martinis, like extra dirty martinis with three olives.

Have you ever had a crush on a cartoon character? Yes. As a kid I had a crush on Sebastian from *The Little Mermaid*. Wait, no! Not the crab. It was Eric who was the prince. That would be really weird if I had a crush on the crab.

What has been your most bizarre fan letter? I don't know. I think I have really sweet, creative fans so I always get really nice fan letters. I do feel slightly guilty when people get, like, tattoos of the logo or lyrics or something because I feel responsible for it. It's like, "Oh God, what if you really regret that in years to come?" 🙄

Ceremonials is out now.



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