

BABY QUEEN - bio

Once Bella Latham gave herself the name "Baby Queen", she felt everything click into place. Young, depressed, and disillusioned with London's fashion scene, she had recently started writing hazy, yawning guitar-pop songs about the superficiality of the world she saw all around her. While trying to come up with an artist name that could go with the songs, which she characterised as "light purple," she came up with the phrase that made her realise something about herself. "I felt like that person, Baby Queen, is everything that I ever wanted to be," she explains. "A lot of what I'm saying [in my songs] is totally so childish and immature, and naive, but also experienced and teen angst and Generation Z. I was like, this is a baby. And this is a queen. Once I'd given myself that name, the sense of identity was overwhelming. I felt like now I could really say something."

Long before she was writing satirical alt-pop about London's fashion scene, Bella was growing up in Durban, South Africa. "It's very much like, small town syndrome," she reflects, though she often misses the access she had to nature in her home country. "Before I made music, I wanted to be a game ranger – somebody who lives in the African wilds and takes people on tours to look at the wild animals. I was absolutely obsessed with the wilderness; I knew all the South African bird books off by heart."

She vividly remembers her dad playing funk and soul mixtapes to her when they went on regular road trips to the wilds. Though the culture of her town was conservative (two gay girls in her school were treated as a "scandal"), Bella found her escape at home in music, as her mum gifted her a guitar and piano, and her musician uncle taught her how to play. An early Taylor Swift obsessive, Bella started writing her own songs at the age of 13 and recording them using an app named Mixcraft. Her dad helped her distribute some demo tapes to friends in Cape Town, and when she was 15, she released some lovestruck songs online. "It was cheesy pop music," she shrugs now. "I used to sing in an American accent – because there was no pop music on the radio where people sang in a South African accent."

Moving to London as a teenager at 18, on a mission to make it in the music industry, was Bella's first step towards becoming Baby Queen. "Part of coming here was detaching myself from the character that I had learned to be, and finding out who I was," she reflects. Initially, she stayed with her aunt and uncle in Fulham, west London, enrolled in a music course at a north London college, and made a habit of going to pubs and gigs alone in the hope of making friends. But after falling out with her family, she moved out to live in a series of house shares (and, for a while, on a boat), and joined a rock band. Between a burgeoning new relationship and an influx of parties, she ended up putting her own project on the back burner. "I was starstruck," she reflects. "They would take me to these fashion parties, and I remember feeling totally see-through, like no one looked at me. No one gave a shit about me because I'm not famous."

It was after she got her heart broken by her ex-girlfriend, and subsequently left the band she was playing in, that Bella realised she had become distracted from making her own music by "all this other frickin' bullshit". She went back to South Africa for a month to regroup, then moved back in with her aunt and uncle in London and began hitting the studio with producer King Ed three times a week to write songs about the experiences she'd had in the world of Instagram influencers. "I started to write bitterly about the world that I had perceived whilst being here in London, and the way that it had changed me, and the narcissist I had become," she says. "I got obsessed with these identities that we cultivate online; the front stage self and the *backstage* self, who you actually are and who you pretend to be." And so Baby Queen was born.

Her sound remained rooted in pop, but mixed in a more complex lyricism, inspired by artists Bella had become a fan of since moving to the UK: Little Simz, Kate Tempest, and Matty Healy of The 1975. She also made use of her talents as a multi-instrumentalist, playing guitar, bass, piano/keys, ukulele, banjo, and even a bit of drums. "I realised that I love dark, complex lyrics over a really happy-go-lucky chord progression." While pop was always her foundation, she says her new music came out sounding more like "soft grunge, not clean pop – there's nothing clean about it at all."

This new burst of songwriting gave rise to 'Internet Religion', her debut single for Polydor: a searingly sharp pop satire that overflows with psychedelic synth shimmers, echoing vocal stabs, and lyrics that cut right to the heart of an extremely online generation: "*This is my internet obsession/ This is why the kids have got depression.*" Bella wrote the song because "I hate the way that social media affects our opinion of ourselves. I hate the way that it is so easy to control your identity online, and you become so obsessed with with who you are online and how many people are liking your pictures, that you probably pretty much don't actually give a shit about anything else." This pre-occupation with online aesthetics and optics, says Bella, "our politics vacillates, depending on who our audience is and what's going to make us more likeable."

"The most important thing about all of this is, I'm not preaching, I'm opening myself up," says Bella. "I'm no different to everyone else. I am part of the problem. It's like a mirror being held up to myself."

She gets even more real on the follow-up song 'Medicine', a song that digs into her own relationship to anti-depressants, and hints at the diaristic intimacy of her songwriting to be unfurled on her EP later in 2020. "It's about a tangle of mental health and navigating your way through this world, whilst being so unhappy and equally disillusioned with the cyber landscape that we are forced to live inside, and the different ways people might numb themselves, or try to find a place where they can exist in amongst all of this fucking chaos."

While it sprang from satire, Baby Queen is a deeply personal project, rooted in Bella's experiences of feeling like a misfit standing on the fringes of something cool. "I felt like so much of a nobody," she reflects, until she realised what a fragile hall of mirrors everything was – how much everybody was struggling with their own demons and hiding behind fakery. She came to the conclusion that the best way to help young girls who might also feel that way was to "satirise the people that make kids feel like nobody. All these people that edit the way that they look online, and they portray these perfect lives. That's what makes you feel like you're nothing. And that's not reality – I was a somebody when I was 13 years old, I was a somebody when I was a nobody at a fashion party, and I'm just as much as somebody now. I want to make music that people can connect to so much that they feel like they don't have to change."