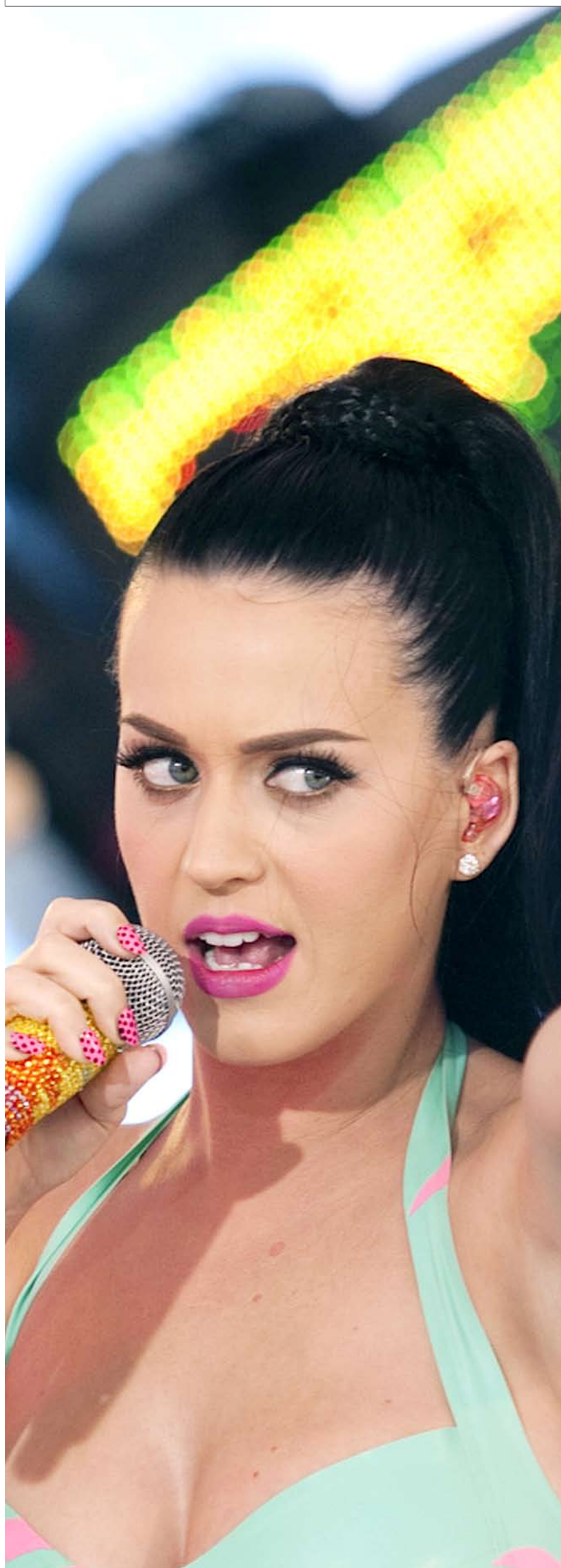


# CULTURE

MONDAY, AUGUST 9, 2010



**"C**an you read sheet music?" asks Katy Perry as we climb the stairs of a photo studio on Broadway.

"A little," I say. She stops and holds out the edges of her dress, patterned with a series of ascending quavers and semiquavers. "Then what song am I?" she asks, twirling.

"Three Blind Mice?" "The Girl From Ipanema," she says, before breaking into song. "I feel like I'm squeezed into a giant condom in this dress," she adds.

Retro pop reference, modern twist, smutty punchline: I'm with the right Katy Perry, then. It's a sweltering day in Manhattan — temperatures are in the 30s — but Perry, who arrived from Los Angeles a few days ago, isn't complaining. "It's good for my voice," she says of the humidity, as a team of make-up artists and hair stylists buzz around, preparing for the shoot.

She concentrates on the mirror in front of her. Her eyes are huge, like an anime character's, with lashes so thick you could use them to rake a lawn. She is wearing a platinum-blond wig; on her left hand is an engagement ring from Russell Brand, whom she met last year at the MTV music awards, an event at which she was lowered on to the stage atop a giant gold banana. ("I like fruit," she shrugs.) With her Vargas girl looks and thrift store-bombshell aesthetic, the singer wouldn't look out of place on the nose cone of a second world war B-17 bomber — or rather the nose cone of a B-17 bomber as painted by Roy Lichtenstein.

"I don't feel like I'm very pop-star lame, but I'm definitely not hipster-cool," she says. "I'm somewhere right in the middle of it all. Because, for me, I want to sell out, but just not in the 'I've sold out' kind of way. I want to sell out arenas and sell millions of records."

The cover of her new album, *Teenage Dream*, features the singer semi-naked draped on a bed of pink tufted clouds. Perry had each cover individually spritzed to smell like candy floss. "It actually smells a bit like My Little Pony," she says, a frown threatening to form. "You know, the toys?" The frown disappears. "So it smells of your childhood, which is always endearing."

Perry is plenty endearing herself — unguarded, unpretentious, flirtatious in a slightly camp way. She swears like a sailor, rattling off the first thing that pops into her head, although her loose tongue has landed her in trouble in the past. When she described herself as a "fatter version of Amy Winehouse and a thinner version of Lily Allen," Allen came out blasting. "It's like, you're not English and you don't write your own songs, shut up!"

In fact, she writes her own lyrics; a producer helps flesh them out into songs. *Teenage Dream* features the already released single *California Gurls*, whose Velcro hook has probably already attached itself to the inside of your cranium, and a handful of love songs — *Hummingbird Heartbeat*, *Not Like the Movies* — inspired by Brand.

"One of the things that attracted me to him is his brain," Perry says. "He's one of the smartest men I've met. I feel smarter just standing next to him." At the MTV music awards, she engineered an introduction by throwing a bottle of water at his head. He tried to get her into bed; she insisted on dinner, and a few weeks later they were on holiday together in Thailand. There's been a rash of speculation about how she "tamed" the self-proclaimed "S&M Willy Wonka," although such talk misses the fact that Brand is the reformed hell-raiser, 25-year-old Perry the pin-up for "gin-n-juice" hedonism. You wonder how that combination is going to work.

"He knows that I'm young and have friends and a social life, and he was attracted to me. Not, 'Oh let's find a version of myself in a female.' Every once in a while I need to remind him of that and he listens. It's all about communication. It's not about taming, because that won't last. Everyone gets saggy tits. Not everything stays perfect. We all start to slow down. I think he was ready for change. I mean, you just don't have the stamina to be in bed with 80 different women a week when

## Katy Perry's pinup perfect

*She swears like a sailor, poses naked and is no stranger to a suggestive song lyric. And now she's engaged to bad boy Russell Brand. How did a nice Christian girl like Katy Perry turn out like this?*

BY TOM SHONE  
THE GUARDIAN, NEW YORK



Katy Perry and boyfriend Russell Brand pose at the premiere of *Get Him to the Greek*, a comedy film in which Brand plays a debauched rock star, at the Greek theater in Los Angeles on May 25.

you're 35 and trying to do good work." They met while she was recording her album — exactly halfway through the writing of the title track, which means the intriguingly personal verse-lyrics ("You think I'm pretty without my make-up on") were written pre-Brand and the anonymous chorus ("You make me feel like a teenage dream") post-Brand.

"It's about that feeling that I think so many people relate to," Perry says, "when they get to their 20s and 30s and remember being a teenager and putting all or nothing into a relationship, and usually getting hurt, but it was such an amazing feeling — so pure and lovely and raw."

This unarguable truth — that there is something pure and lovely and raw about teenage emotions — is the driving force behind the Perry phenomenon; a success story that seems custom-made to make the heads of *New Musical Express* rock music paper readers explode like melons. For all the retro stylings, her lyrics are cut with just enough *Jagged Little Pill* realism to satisfy tween fans that they're not just being fobbed off with fluff ("There's a stranger in my bed/And a pounding in my head" she sings on *Last Friday Night*, a rousing anthem to binge-drinking). Beneath the puppies-and-peppermint cuteness lies an unsentimental take on the industry that sustains her.

"You have to bust your ass at this," she says, "which is why you don't find getting shitfaced in bars that much. It's so intense, it's like you catch

a rocket and you're hanging on for dear life and you're like, 'Gooooooo!' The second record I'm more buckled in because, God, how many times do you see people slump on their sophomore record? Nine out of 10. But I'm still working, like, 13-hour days, five, six days a week and singing on top of it. And knowing that there's someone right behind me, ready to go, ready to push me down the stairs, just like in *Showgirls*."

The middle child of three, her parents were both born-again Pentecostal ministers in southern California — Christian camp, Christian friends, no MTV, no radio — but press stories of a parental rift over Perry's lyrics ignore the "born again" bit. Before they came to their faith, her parents were 60s scenesters, her mother briefly dating Jimi Hendrix. Her father took acid and hung out with Timothy Leary. "They're kooky little critters," she says. "Of course they'll hear a song like *Peacock*, and there's a little moan that comes out of them: 'Ooooh, Katy.' Or when they see a magazine cover, they're like, 'Put some clothes on.' But we get along fabulously. There's no disowning. They know that the best thing they can do is support and love me and pray for me and not judge me. That's why you don't see me having a breakdown. That's why I'm not hooked on drugs."

At 17, she started traveling back and forth to Nashville to record an album of Christian rock, but when her record company went bankrupt, she moved to Los Angeles to start again, this time getting as far as an actual record, with actual sleeve notes, before that deal, too, collapsed. Broke, she got a job in A&R at a small record label just outside Los Angeles.

"That was the most depressing moment of my hustle," she recalls. "I was sitting there in a cubicle, with 25 other trying-to-make-it-some-failed-artists in a box listening to the worst music you've ever heard in your entire life. Having no money, writing bad checks, renting a car after two cars had been repossessed, trying to give people constructive criticism and hope, when really I wanted to jump out of the building or cut my ears off and say, 'I can't help you! I can't catch a break. What am I gonna say to you? And you sing off tune.'"

By the time Capitol records fished out an old demo of hers from the slushpile, she was ready. "I was like, someone throw the ball. I will hit that home run. I knew *I Kissed a Girl* was going to have an impact. It was hooky for me. I couldn't stop singing it." Her innuendo-laden floor filler, released in 2008, topped the charts in 30 countries; while the album from which it was released, *One of the Boys*, went platinum, selling more than 7 million copies. Promoting the follow-up, Perry will soon leave for Malaysia, Singapore, then Australia, Japan. "My air miles are impeccable," she says. The biggest challenge faced by her and Brand, these days, is scheduling. Though she was miffed to find her fiancé beating her to the cover of *Rolling Stone*.

"I was like, 'You bitch! I was working in America first!'" she says, faux outraged. "For his birthday invitation, I did an e-vite superimposing my face on his *Rolling Stone* cover. 'Come to my birthday party.'"

What do her parents make of him?

"My mother's in love with him. And my father, I think he sees a lot of himself in him."

Perry and Brand have just bought a US\$3 million home in Los Angeles and are looking for a place in New York. When I ask whether this onrush of domesticity is likely to have any influence on her music, she groans. "Everyone asks me that. You look at someone like Beyoncé singing *Single Ladies*, when we all know she's married. Some of it is just for entertainment."

But you can't stay singing about being a teenager forever.

"Oh, I will always be honest with my music," she says. "The records are black boxes for me. Like if you want to know who I am, my views, my perspective, things I love, things I hate, my convictions, my anthems. I've never let people's opinions affect the way I write."

Worrying about the future is not really Perry's style. She's all about the now, and right now, she and her music are, as the lyric to *California Gurls* has it, "undeniable."

## TOP FIVE MANDARIN ALBUMS

JULY 30 TO AUG. 5



**1** Han Geng (韓庚) and *Geng Xin* (庚心) with **33%** of sales

**2** Terri Kwan (關穎) and *The Secret That Can't Be Kept* (關不住的秘密) with **10.7%**

**3** Delia, aka Ring (丁噐), and *Fu Good* (下一站 天后) with **4.81%**

**4** Jing Chang (張芸京) and *The Opposite Me* (相反的我) with **4.12%**

**5** C.D.W. (東城衛) and self-titled album with **3.73%**

ALBUM CHART COMPILED FROM G-MUSIC (WWW.G-MUSIC.COM.TW), BASED ON RETAIL SALES

## PLANET POP

**U2** frontman Bono burst back onto rock's center stage on Friday after a two-month absence for a back injury, as the Irish band resumed what its manager predicts will be the most lucrative concert tour in history.

U2 shook a packed Olympic stadium in Turin, Italy, as Bono strutted, pranced, jogged and danced with little sign of being a 50-year-old rock star just 10 weeks off spinal surgery.

"I don't really know how to hold back, is the problem. You have to let the songs sing you at a certain point," Bono said just before relaunching the second leg of U2's 360 Degree Tour, so called because fans surround a giant circular platform.

U2 and Bono, who said he had done rehabilitation work for three to four hours a day, kicked off a rousing set with *Beautiful Day* and *Magnificent*. They also played two new tracks called *North Star Acoustic* and *Glastonbury*. Bono thanked the cheering crowd for letters and e-mails he had received wishing him a speedy recovery.

"This band is like a family. It's a family business, U2. I am the prodigal son. I would like to thank my brothers for their patience," the leather-clad Bono told the crowd, referring to his bandmates. The singer underwent emergency

back surgery in May after injuring himself. His subsequent rehabilitation forced the band to delay the North American leg of the tour until next year. U2's tour is widely expected to be a strong point in a weak concert season hit by low sales.

"This tour by the end of this year will be the biggest-grossing music tour by anyone of all time," Guinness predicted. "And we will still have another 30 shows next year, 20 to 30 shows next year."

He added that the group would probably gross somewhere between US\$650 million to US\$700 million by the time the tour ends next year.

That would top the record US\$558 million generated by the Rolling Stones' 2005 to 2007 Bigger Bang tour, according to music industry publication *Billboard Boxscore*.

While Bono is ready to rock, ex-Fugees star Pras says childhood friend and former bandmate Wyclef Jean is not ready to be president of Haiti.

The Haitian-born musician says he will not back Jean because he lacks a definitive plan to bring the island nation into the 21st century.

"You've got 1.2 million people living in tent city right now. What are the plans to get these people out," Pras said of the

survivors of the Jan. 12 earthquake. Pras plans to support Jean's opponent, Michel "Sweet Micky" Martelly, who he said is better suited to run the country.

"He's more popular in Haiti than Wyclef," said Pras.

Jean's publicist, Leslie Chasky, didn't immediately return a telephone call on Friday night seeking a response to Pras' comments.

Jean is currently regarded as the front-runner in the country's Nov. 28 election. But he has come under scrutiny since officially announcing his candidacy on Thursday.

Actor Sean Penn has accused Jean of not spending enough time in Haiti after the quake and misappropriating US\$400,000 of the US\$9 million his charity, Yele Haiti, raised after the disaster.

Jean told the Associated Press on Thursday: "I just want Sean Penn to fully understand I am a Haitian, born in Haiti and I've been coming to my country ever since [I was] a child."

Pras said that Jean uses a private jet for his frequent trips to Haiti and

that he wonders why Jean doesn't take a commercial flight, since the money saved can help displaced families.

He added that he loves Wyclef "dearly," but he just doesn't support his policies.

Also on Friday, a California judge extended for three years a stay away order against a man who is accused of stalking Oscar-winning actress Sandra Bullock.

The restraining

order bars 41-year-old Thomas Weldon from coming within 100 yards of Bullock, her adopted baby boy and the three children of her ex-husband Jesse James.

Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Carol Boas Goodson had issued a temporary order against Weldon on July 19, after a previous stay away order expired last year.

"This is clearly a case of a fan going beyond being a fan," Goodson said. "This is the downside of celebrity."

Weldon allegedly showed up at a house Bullock keeps in Wyoming this past June, saying he had driven there to meet her. The previous orders were issued for similar attempts he made to meet the 45-year-old actress, who won a best-actress Oscar for her role in football film, *The Blind Side*. Bullock's attorney Edwin F. McPherson said Weldon is currently in a mental health facility in Wyoming.

Bullock, who recently relocated to Texas from the Los Angeles area, was not present for the hearing.

U2 is on the road again after Bono's recovery from back surgery.

PHOTO: REUTERS

