

UNTAMED MELODY

Is MILEY CYRUS just another spoiled starlet going off the rails? JOE ROGERST thinks not, and spoke to her about being stalked by the paparazzi, playing Demi Moore's teenage daughter, and her dark sense of humour

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location / HOLLYWOOD, CALIFORNIA

GOWN: LLOYD KLEIN COUTURE

JEWELLERY: YOUNNA

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ALL IT COINCIDENCE, but sometimes life has a strange way of sending messages. Recently I undertook a pilgrimage to the Hollywood Bowl to see Dolly Parton in concert. Halfway through the gig, the country icon interrupted her songfest to talk about her goddaughter Miley Cyrus. “She’s a good girl. She’ll get through this just fine,” Parton said, suggesting that we should all remember what it was like to be young, impetuous and a little bit wild. There was no way for me to know that, just a few weeks later, I would be discussing that very topic with Cyrus herself.

Parton was referring to Cyrus’ public and often tumultuous attempt to morph from the child star of Disney Channel’s runaway hit TV series *Hannah Montana* into a young adult actor and singer. While not in the same league as those of Lindsay Lohan and Paris Hilton, Cyrus’ early adult career has been fraught with controversy. There was Annie Leibovitz’s *Vanity Fair* photo shoot in which the then 15-year-old Cyrus appeared to be wrapped in only a bed sheet. Racy photos were hacked from her e-mail account and circulated on the web. Celebrity gossipmongers TMZ released a video showing Cyrus smoking from a bong. Though she hit back saying it contained a legal substance, the footage was scandalous enough for her father, country star Billy Ray Cyrus (of “Achy Breaky Heart” fame), to scold her publicly. Critics say her concert outfits and music videos are too risqué. And on and on it goes – all minor stuff in the annals of showbiz scandal, but shocking for those raised on goody-two-shoes Hannah Montana.

Gossip aside, what sets the 18-year-old apart from so many starlets of her generation is that she has talent. Although her acting skills may still need some honing, when it comes to a song, she can hold her own. Cyrus can also shift records: she’s had top-40 hits in at least a dozen countries and is the youngest artist of all time to chalk up four number-one albums in just three years.



DRESS: DOLCE & GABBANA
HAT: LLOYD KLEIN COUTURE
SHOES: CHRISTIAN LOUBOUTIN



DRESS: EMILIO PUCCI
JEWELLERY: YOUNNA



JACKET: YVES SAINT LAURENT
LINGERIE: DOLCE & GABBANA
SHOES: CHRISTIAN LOUBOUTIN

With the “Queen of Country Music” as a godmother and a singing legend for a father, Cyrus – who was born and bred in Nashville – is descended from country-and-western royalty. Her birth name was Destiny Hope, but that didn’t stick. According to family legend, she grinned so much as a baby that people started calling her Smiley, later shortened to Miley. Another family fable holds that she caught the showbiz bug at age eight, when she saw a stage performance of the musical *Mamma Mia!* in Toronto.

What is known for sure is that Cyrus was a virtual unknown in 2006, when she auditioned for a daytime TV series about a young California girl with a double life as pop star and schoolgirl. Despite her lack of acting experience, Cyrus’ country twang and down-home charm made her a natural for the role. A modern take on *The Prince and the Pauper*, *Hannah Montana* became the biggest hit in Disney Channel history, and made Cyrus as internationally famous as previous Disney creations Britney Spears and Justin Timberlake.

By 2007 she was on the concert circuit, touring first as her alter ego Montana, and then under her own name. But the teenage hormones were kicking in and Cyrus was growing up, evolving from the little girl – who had basically done whatever the Disney brass had asked of her – into a teenager with attitude and ideas about the direction her career should travel. While music remains her forte, Cyrus has two movies – *LOL: Laughing Out Loud* and *So Undercover* – set for release this year, and she has made it known that she wants to expand her acting career beyond the “singing girl next door” role that has dominated her path thus far.

With Parton’s words still ringing in my ears, I settled in to interview Cyrus about her roller-coaster life and work.

After seven years in Los Angeles, are you a Southern or a California girl these days?

I’m not a big fan of LA, I’ve got to be honest. I like being able to work here, but any chance to get to go back home [to Tennessee], I love it. People really take life for granted in California. It makes me sad sometimes. So I have to give myself that reality check every once in a while and go back home. Everyone [in LA] is so busy and everyone is trying to be better than the other person, and everyone has got so much going on. Nashville life is just so laid back and people enjoy every second of life that they have.

Do you miss Hannah Montana?

No [laughs]. I miss the family vibe, but I don’t miss the routine at all. I was so bored doing the same thing every day. It’s a lot easier not being on a show, to live my life a little bit and do some of the other things that I want to do. I don’t have to be back at a certain time. You’re not worrying about a cast schedule or what the producers are going to think. I’m so grateful that I

was able to be on that show, but even my little sister, who’s 11, who wants to go into acting, I say, “Just wait, dude.” Because the way you’re going to be when you’re my age and the way you are right now are so different. Don’t put yourself into a situation where people are going to think of you as only *one* thing. You’re going to change a lot. You’re going to change every year. It interferes with your growing up if you’re not strong and you’re not sure who you want to be. I’m glad I’m not a character any more and able to be me.

During the run of Hannah Montana, did you ever fantasise that you had a secret life as an ordinary schoolgirl, like your character Miley Stewart?

There were times, for sure, when I thought that – that it would be amazing. There are

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some artists who get a chance to do that sort of thing – people who have such a different personality when they go onstage and when they take time off – and that’s kind of what I’m doing right now. But there were times during Hannah Montana when I wanted that, for sure.

What sort of things would you have done if you could have had that secret life?

People lose a lot of respect for other human beings when they find out you’re famous, because they’ve never experienced it. I’m with my boyfriend, for instance, and we’re walking around. We’re sure that no one is taking our picture. We are sure of it. No one has followed us. No one is here. And then, a few hours later, it’s like, “Miley Cyrus Alert.” She was seen with Ian in public, they were kissing and hugging, and you’re like, “What the hell? I didn’t see anybody taking our photograph that day.” I think that’s what I would have enjoyed most – just being able to be in public and not feel like I’m being watched. You know,

COAT: LLOYD KLEIN COUTURE
BOOTS: GIO DIEV
LINGERIE: GEORGES HOBEIKA
JEWELLERY: GLYNNETH BARREN



my dad and me, we're pretty good with fans. We don't mind people taking our picture if they ask. But when they don't ask, that's a whole different level of weird.

The Gypsy Heart Tour was earlier this year, and you went to cool places in South America and Australia. When you're on tour like that, do you have time to be an ordinary tourist?

I make sure of that. I've wanted to go on tour for a while, get back on the road. But I did this tour mainly because I wanted to travel. I love to travel. I made it so that we had a show and then two days off, a show and then two days off. I got to enjoy places a lot. It was funny [because] some places were out of control and I couldn't walk around. But other countries

albums kind of blow up, and my singles. It looks really good when your boyfriend is from there. It's like, "Hey, I sold this place out." That makes you feel pretty awesome.

You've been making movies lately. Tell us about So Under Cover and LOL: Laughing Out Loud.

There are things I do for me, and there are things I do for the fans, and *So Under Cover* was something I really wanted to do for the fans. It's the kind of comedy that they're used to seeing me do on my show. It's more for the 13-, 14-, 15-, 16-year-old crowd. *LOL: Laughing Out Loud* is still for the younger kids, but we did it independently and we shot it with Demi Moore and me. It's more like real life. It's a really cool story about a mom and a daughter, and the girl becoming a teenager and the mom going through a midlife crisis, and how a lot of things that they are going through are actually the same. It's funny how life kind of works like that.

Does Demi Moore make a great mom?

She was an awesome mom. In this movie she was so much like the way she is with her own daughters. She's so amazing. She's been in the industry since she was my age and has gone through a ton of stuff. She's taken her time and gone away to raise her kids, and come back and shown you can still have a real life and be in this industry. Every day I would learn from her. Hopefully I can take what she did to the next step.

You don't have any other movies fixed up right now, do you?

I'm in the middle of going back and forth on a couple of films and trying to figure out what I really want to do. Right now I just want to focus on the sort of movies that I would rush to go see. There have been a few films that have been brought to me that have been interesting, but nothing is definite. I just want a really good game plan right now. This is when I'm going to work and this is when I'm going to be off, that sort of thing. Hopefully, by the end of this year I'll be working on something.

Do you want to do serious drama?

What I watch and the movies I like to do...I've got kind of a weird, dark sense of humour, really dry humour, so I would love to do more comedies, but not the comedies that people have seen me in. More kind of dry, that kind of style, independently shot, but also some laugh-out-loud funny stuff and drama as well. When you become a character, you want to make sure that it's a part you want to open up and explore for yourself. So I think the next few things...there's a comedy that I'm working on now and something a little darker.

I have two teenage daughters, about six years apart. Both follow your career after Hannah Montana. That suggests you appeal to a broader base than many think.

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were really respectful and [people] wanted me to know that they wanted me to have a really good time in their country. There are some places I'd really like to go back to and see more of, but be a little more incognito.

What are some of the spots that really stuck out from the tour?

I'm in love with Argentina. I would not mind staying there for a little while because I had the best time in Argentina. We went out and just walked around one night and found some food, but not with a tour guide. Let's find what's fun, let's meet cool local people. And the hotel we stayed at, I've never seen anything like it. It was so beautiful. Australia was one of my favourites too. My boyfriend is Australian, so getting to go there and perform for his family and friends was insane and really important. It was a really cool bonding experience.

You played to huge audiences in Australia – more than 25,000 people in several places.

Even though I'd never been there before, my albums have always been really successful in Australia. It's one of the places that my

CORSET: THE BLONDS
LINGERIE: DOLCE & GABBANA

People have two very mixed opinions of me: I'm a great role model, or I'm completely inappropriate for anyone under 13 and I am controversial. I don't know how I became this. There was this magazine article the other day, showing all the younger celebrities. It was like Girl Next Door or whatever, and I fell under the category of Good Girl Gone Bad. And I was like, "What the hell, man?" I stay in the house pretty much every day. I don't go out. I've had the same boyfriend for two years. So I think there are two very different reviews.

The ones who do look up to me as a role model...I think it's because I'm so real. If they tell you that they haven't tried this or haven't experimented with that, they're lying. And I'll never do that because personally I can't, because there will be some proof on the Internet. It's weird...two complete extremes. I'm not some crazy lady who's gone off the deep end, because I definitely haven't. I just always try to be real. Every 18-year-old explores sexuality and experiments and tries things. For me there's no reason to change that. You have to be true to yourself. [Veteran rocker] Joan Jett has been in my life over the past year and has taught me a lot about that. She got looked down on for talking about sex and drugs or whatever. They were like, "How dare a woman say that. How dare a girl come out and admit those things," when every other girl her age was doing the same thing. She just went on stage and sang about it.

My last album, *Can't Be Tamed*, was such a statement for women everywhere. The song "Liberty Walk," I wrote it about abuse and women being put down. I think the last album is what made the older fans follow me. Who I am now is very different from who I was when I was 11. I had to grow up extremely quick. When you live in LA you see a lot. You are exposed to a lot more than people in other places. That's just LA, especially in show business.

Is there anything that people don't know about you that might surprise them?

I think people who meet me, especially if you come into my space where I live - it's weird describing myself this way but - I think it's kind of how simple my life really is. I'm really driven, obviously. I've always been that way, but my life is just really mellow, and I like hanging out. I think if they walked into where I live, they'd realise how the [public] perception of me is so different from who I really am. My dad is Native American, so I spend 90 percent of my time outside, going on hikes. That's my lifestyle right now. The press seems to think that I'm trying to make this big turn and become a bad girl, and really I'm trying to be more connected with the Earth, more connected with myself and figure out who I am, try to understand the world a little more. I'm not doing this for anyone else but me. I just had this talk a few nights ago with my mom - just about looking at life in a completely different way. I've obviously been very blessed, but with every blessing there's a curse. I'm very content with where my life is right now. People would be shocked to know that I'm very thankful for what I have, but my career is not my main priority, is not my life any more. I really just want to enjoy life and explore nature and become who I am to the fullest. ■



DRESS: ESCADA
JEWELLERY: PAOLO BONGIA

