



BLACK JACKET AND HEELS SHOES
BY LOUIS VUITTON, LEATHER
TROUSERS AND CHARM NECKLACE
BY GIVENCHY, GREY T-SHIRT BY
AMERICAN APPAREL

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HYPERACTIVE POP
SPRITE LYKKE LI
ON UNREQUITED
LOVE, SOUNDING
LIKE A LITTLE GIRL
AND WISHING SHE
WAS TOM WAITS

LYKKE LI (pronounced ‘Lookki Lee’) Timotej Zahrisson is such a mess of contrasting emotions – from brash confidence to alarming fragility and back in a single sentence – you have to wonder if she has what it takes to cope with the soul-flying highs and crushing lows of your average music career. “I was confident, like I knew I was going to get my music out there and I’m going to be a legend,” claims the Nordic pop-starlet. “At the same time, I was like, ‘What the fuck if I don’t? What if I’m not a star? Then I’m gonna *die*.’”

EIGHTEEN MONTHS AGO the impetuous, impatient Swede was fretting to mentor Björn Yttling that her life was fading away because she was 21 and hadn’t yet released her first album. Now that she has – the deceptively simple *Youth Novels* – even that’s not entirely fulfilling in Lykke-land. “My intention was to make a really obscure record,” insists Li, phoning from LA at the start of a U.S. tour. “I wanted to do an album that nobody understands but is genius. And then it became really accessible...” But you’re not *really* disappointed? “Yes, I am... I don’t want to be pinned down as just a young girl with a girlish voice. I’m like, ‘Do they not know that I’m like Tom Waits?’”

IT WOULD BE EASY to write Li off as just another self-declared maestro desperate to share her muse with the world, but that would be to overlook her obvious gifts. With its sweetly melodic, multi-instrumental flavour (even the theremin makes an appearance), the album – accompanied by self-consciously kooky videos in which Li’s seemingly angry gaze defies you to look away – has put her brand of Scandinavian synth-pop on the map. With her sugary, ethereal vocals and passionate, wounded lyrics, she’s hypnotic and amusing at the same time. It’s this wit that marks out Li from the army of pouting, blank-faced nymphs who become one or two-hit wonders.

LI’S LOVE OF PERFORMANCE began early. Her family abandoned Sweden after Chernobyl’s radioactive rains and decamped to Portugal, where she spent carefree formative years writing poetry, ballet dancing and putting on a stuffed bra to perform Madonna songs. The boundary-free existence also has its downside, she insists: “I have no home and when I talk with my mum she is the same way. She says, ‘Maybe I should live in India, or maybe I should stop taking photos and open a dog kennel, or maybe I should become a Reiki therapist.’ There’s no comfort – we’re just drifting souls.”

WHILE BOTH HER PARENTS were players in the Swedish punk scene, Li draws her own inspiration from sonic eccentrics like Nina Simone, Dr. John and alternative-rockers Suicide. “I listen to dark, strong voices, and if I would try to copy that, that would just be a mess.” She’s the first to admit that her voice was no great shakes when she started recording. In fact it’s the reason she settled into a cooing, baby-doll singing style, which she pairs with trademark confessional lyrics (in *Little Bit* she sings, ‘And for you I keep my legs apart/And forget about my tainted heart’). “*Little Bit* is about an unrequited infatuation,” she admits. Where relationships are concerned, it transpires, Li doesn’t cope very well: “I have the balls to do anything but when it comes to the guys that I like, I’m shy.”

TOURING INTO 2009, Li says she won’t succumb to the pressure to rush out a second album because she’s craving more life experience first: “I’m kind of a loner. I don’t take any advice from anybody. I make up my life all by myself... You never know what lies ahead. It’s like fresh food – you just have to keep making it.”

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HAIR
CHI AT PREMIER FOR TOMMY GUNS
NY USING KIEHL'S

MAKE-UP
ANITA KEELING AT CAREN USING
SHU UEMURA

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