

Biography 2015

You don't so much listen to Rosie Lowe's music as lose yourself in it. Her sensual songs are windows to her world, through which you find yourself dreamily drawn. Her hypnotic vocals reel you in, imparting stories like secrets being whispered in your ear or subconscious confessions you're wary to share.

That Rosie doesn't remember writing her songs make sense when you hear them. What's going on in her mind comes out of her mouth, so naturally she can't control it.

"For me, writing can be completely subconscious," says Rosie. "I don't remember doing it. I don't decide how I want a song to sound. I never think how it will feel for other people. A clear vision comes in to my head and I try to capture its meaning as quickly as possible. If I don't, it can get confusing. 90% of the time, I don't know how I feel until I write a song. As cheesy as this sounds, it's my therapy."

Control, the 25 year old's debut album, is a synth-soul masterpiece. It's instrumentally sparse yet atmospherically dense, at once warm and spine-chilling, both subtle and bold. It's music of such spectral beauty it haunts you long after it's gone.

Summing up Rosie's sound isn't easy. The Guardian called her "*a more machinistic Laura Mvula or an xx-rated Sade*". She's been compared to everyone from Solange, Jesse Ware and The Weeknd to Drake, James Blake and Air. You might describe her music as electronic R&B, yet it's built mostly from vocals. You could call it soul, but it's also jazz, hip hop and glitchy, pitch-shifting pop.

"I wanted the songs to be spacious, but have heavy drums and lots of intricate sounds in the background that you may only hear on your fourth listen," says Rosie. "We used old synths, although often what sounds like synths are actually vocals. It's a very, very vocal heavy album. They're the bed of every song. Who's That Girl? has over 100 vocal tracks. Sinking Sand is entirely vocals, but fucked with so much they sound like instruments."

While Control depicts specific events that occurred in its 18-month gestation, Rosie's sound stems from a lifetime spent making music. She can't recall ever not singing, while her much of her childhood was spent learning instruments. The youngest of six kids, she was brought up in a remote part of south Devon – her nearest neighbours were a 45 minute walk away – by an artist mother and a multi-instrumentalist father who played saxophone in local bands.

"My childhood is a huge part of why I'm doing music," says Rosie. "We lived in a wooden house my dad built at the bottom of a valley where there wasn't much else to do. We had no TV because we didn't get a signal. When I was really young, there wasn't even electricity. It was a very simple existence. We had a camping stove on which half the hobs didn't work. There was no heating. If you wanted hot water, you had to light the fire. Our entertainment was being creative and making music."

The kids all played music together. Thanks to her dad, Rosie was as obsessed with Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday and Sarah Vaughan as she was with the Spice Girls. And when her dad taught music lessons, he left Rosie in the car, singing along to the Ella and Billie backing tracks he'd bought her.

As a kid, Rosie played six instruments, including piano, violin and sax, at which she excelled and still plays today. But it was singing that came most naturally to her. By the age of 12, Rosie had been in a big band, an orchestra and various girl groups who performed songs she had written. By the time she was 14, she had already spent three years fronting a jazz band that performed around Devon every weekend.

"From 12 to 18, the jazz band was how I made my money," says Rosie. "I played sax and sang. I loved being on stage."

In her teens, Rosie became obsessed with strong female singer/songwriters - Carole King, Erykah Badu, Joni Mitchell among them. She learnt their songs then broke them apart. She analysed their lyrics. She fell in love with the art of songwriting. Aged 19, she got in to the prestigious Goldsmiths at University of London to study popular music. It was there that she found her sound, but not until her

final year. For one course, Rosie ditched her instruments, got a computer and Logic software and started learning to produce and to record herself singing.

"I sang everything – from the piano lines to the melody. Basically, everything I heard in my head. It was the most freeing thing I've ever done and it saved my bacon. My tutors loved it."

After university, Rosie nannied by day and wrote all night, posting the results on Soundcloud for her friends to hear. She was soon approached by management and signed to Domino Publishing, releasing her adored, four-track debut EP, *Right Thing*, co-produced with friends Kwes (Damon Albarn, Solange, Bobby Womack) and The Invisible's Dave Okumu (Jessie Ware, Paloma Faith, Kwabs, The Invisible), who would go on to work on *Control*.

Right Thing marked another milestone in the evolution of Rosie's sound; "It was first time I was brutally honest and vulnerable in my writing," says Rosie. "People responded – that was exciting. It was liberating. I could truly be myself."

Label offers flooded in for Rosie's debut album. She signed to Paul Epworth's *Wolf Tone*, partly because the super-producer was a big fan, mostly because of his deep understanding of music. The first song written for *Control* was *Nicole*, a plea to Rosie's best friend to leave a bad relationship.

"She was with a man who clearly wasn't good enough for her," says Rosie. "I didn't like him, but I couldn't vocalise that. I felt I had to respect her wishes so I wrote a song instead."

First single *Who's That Girl*, released in the spring, was written after Rosie fell ill and was in and out of hospital. Not all of her so-called friends stuck by her.

"When something bad happens, it's a real test of who your friends are," she says "Who stands up and who doesn't. The song is about someone I held in high regard who disappeared and I didn't recognise anymore."

The changing nature of relationships is one of *Control's* key themes. New single *Worry About Us* sees Rosie reassuring an insecure partner that all is okay.

"But when you reassure someone like that, it's difficult. Sometimes it's for the sake of not having to deal with it. There's a darkness in the lyrics that refers to the problems of having a partner who always assumes the worst, who's like a trigger waiting to be pulled."

So Human was inspired by the therapy sessions Rosie has attended for the past five years.

"I'm a huge advocate for therapy," she says. "It's sexy to be vulnerable. I go every week, religiously, and I will until the day I die. I think everyone should go. My boyfriend and I wouldn't be together if it wasn't for therapy. Like music, therapy is an outlet to be honest that helps me make sense of my life."

The spine-tingling *Woman* is a self-explanatory feminist anthem that feels like *Control's* beating heart.

"I'm a huge feminist and really proud of that," says Rosie. "I've been told that the world is better for women now, but the fact is we're still a long way from being treated as equals. It's not a song vocalised at men. It's more for young girls and what they have to deal with today. I want them to be able to say 'This isn't ok'."

The gorgeous, Erykah Badu-influenced *Gone* is one of several songs about Rosie's boyfriend.

"I'm asking him to make me stay when times get tough, to not to allow me to run away," she says. "Like a lot of this album, it's about relinquishing control. Learning to trust other people is a recurring theme in my life and control is a word that crops up in 80% of the songs, although I only realised that after I'd written them."

"For years, especially as a woman, I felt I had to hold tight to everything. But what happens, happens. To let myself fall in love, I had to learn to let go. It's the same with the album. Once it's out, I can't control what happens or how people will react."