stellar COVER STORY

"AS A YOUNG PERSON, I DIDN'T HAVE A CHANCE. WE WERE LIKE PREY"

MELANIE C DISCUSSES BEING "THROWN TO THE LIONS" WITH THE SPICE GIRLS, FINDING HER VOICE AND A NEW SOUND, HOW HER AUSTRALIAN PARTNER HAS SHIFTED HER PERSPECTIVE – AND THOSE REUNION RUMOURS

Interview Sarrah Le Marquand **Photography** Oliver Begg **Styling** Irene Tsolakas **Hair** Michael Brennan **Make-up** Mikele Simone

This July marks 30 years since the Spice Girls' debut single 'Wannabe' was released. Could you have imagined at the time that you'd still be working in the industry three decades later? Because the culture has moved on, and we're embracing women, like yourself, having fantastic careers with no end in sight? That was such an exciting time for me and the rest of the Spice Girls. We experienced sexism within the industry really early on, which made us determined to be a girl band for girls. And then, quite quickly, we realised we had a great following in the LGBTQ+ community. It became this really beautiful movement that was so inclusive.

It wasn't until I got a little bit older that I discovered the ageism in the industry – there was definitely a time we wouldn't have had these opportunities in our 50s. Things have started to shift, though; there are incredible female artists, like Kylie Minogue and Madonna, who are still out there, who are still making great music.

I think women are having a real moment. We talk about it on *The Voice* [on which she is a coach] – women have something to say, we've lived. There are so many things that happen with age and one of those is wisdom, and a real comfortableness with yourself. That's something you don't have when you're younger.

Your ninth studio album *Sweat* will be released on May 1, and this is your first interview since announcing a new global tour – which includes an Australian leg – later this year. It feels like you're bringing together your pop and DJ sides? That's what I've been working towards over the last few records. I was a hardcore raver back in the day. I was fascinated by these all-night parties, where people were just dancing, and it was such a euphoric environment. But when I became a Spice Girl, I had to leave that behind. I'll always be a pop artist but it's been really fun delving into the dance and electronic worlds.

When you take *Sweat* out on the road, how will those inspirations play out compared to previous global tours you've undertaken? I want to change things up a bit. I've been touring continuously since the '90s and I've played different genres with different albums, focusing on whatever's inspiring me at that time. But right now it's very electronic, it's really up, it's really fun. DJing is a big part of it. Fitness is a big part of it as well – a song like 'Sweat', it's a little bit tongue-in-cheek. We've had a lot of fun with lyrics and playing on that sporty persona. So the tour is going to reflect that. It's going to be visually really fun. I always bring the energy. I love being on stage. I'm still bouncing around.

You're here filming your second season as a coach on *The Voice Australia*. You were only 20 when you auditioned for the Spice Girls – does it bring back memories of your early days? Being a coach on *The Voice* is so inspiring because it reminds you of the ambition, hunger and talent that's out there. In season one I found it quite difficult, because I didn't have the confidence in my ability to help people improve. Then I saw the rapid improvement in a lot of my artists, so I've come back this season feeling a lot more confident and really excited to get into it.

You broke into the music industry in the late '90s and early 2000s, at a time when society was pretty brutal to women in the public eye. Do you think this has improved? We do live in a very different world now, and our children are having a really hard time because social media is so prevalent. But back in the '90s the tabloid media was hardcore. We were bullied; it was really nasty. When I was writing my memoir, it gave me an opportunity to go back and look at some of those articles. It was quite cathartic, because I did struggle. I suffered from depression, eating disorders and anxiety. I'm a very driven and a very disciplined person. But looking back over the things that were written about me and the other girls gave me the freedom to forgive myself. Because as a young person, I didn't have a chance. We were like prey. We were hunted. And they were very, very cruel. It wasn't just me, it wasn't just the Spice Girls – it was every woman in the public eye.

When the Spice Girls were thrust into the spotlight as a group, you were all so young and unguarded. What are your memories of that time? It was a funny time, because we never had any media training, which I believe anyone going into the public eye would now. Sometimes I say media training was invented because of the Spice Girls, because we literally didn't care. We went out there, we said exactly what we wanted to say, we spoke over each other... But it was brutal in a sense, because we weren't given any guidance. We were kind of thrown to the lions, especially in the '90s, in the UK. The media was savage. And we got our fingers bent many, many times. We had to learn quickly.

You've been a public figure for a long time now. Do you ever dream about a life out of the spotlight? The grass is always greener, isn't it? As an artist, I love what I do and in the last couple of years since meeting my partner, I've started to accept that my work is such a big part of my life. Rather than separating work and life, I enjoy them both together, which has been a big shift. I think that really happened after I met my partner, Chris [Dingwall, who is an Australian model and filmmaker]. He's able to travel with me a lot, he's a screenwriter so he can work from anywhere, and that usually means with me, which is good for me. It's so beautiful to be able to enjoy the life I have with the person I love.

The Spice Girls officially split in 2001, but you all remain friends. What's the secret to your lasting friendship? When we were first together, we were so single-minded in what we wanted to achieve. And we always celebrated our differences. At that time, we came together, we wanted the same thing, we made it happen. And we had this incredible ride. Then there have been times in life where our differences have kept us apart. This is just life, you know? We were young and we were under a lot of pressure and a lot of scrutiny. We've gone through these different phases with our friendships.

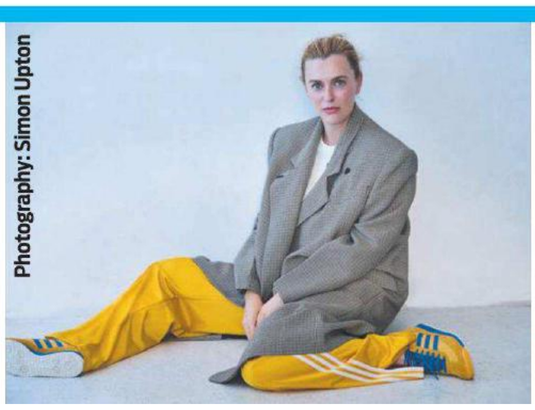
We're more than friends, we're more than colleagues; it's like family. We know each other's children, we've watched them grow, in fact we were there for the birth of some of them. We know each other's parents and siblings... So it's this huge family. I'd say now we're all in our 50s and our kids are older, we probably respect and appreciate each other more than we ever have, and that just comes with the passing of time.

Sometimes somebody is naughty – we've all got friends and there are moments where someone steps out of line. But no matter what happens, if anybody needs something, we all know we're there for each other.

This week...

AUSTRALIAN FIRST-TIMERS AT THE OSCARS

Rose Byrne, Jacob Elordi and Nick Cave are among the Aussies vying for an Oscar at the 98th Annual Academy Awards, being hosted again by comedian Conan O'Brien. Follow @stellar on Instagram for live updates from the ceremony – where some of the award races are more unpredictable than they have been in years – and to see our favourite red-carpet looks. *The 98th Oscars ceremony airs from 10am tomorrow on the Seven Network and 7Plus*



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FILMS WITH A FRENCH CONNECTION

Celebrate the birthplace of film at the Alliance Française French Film Festival, until April 28 at cinemas across the country. As festival patron and director Gracie Otto tells *Stellar*, "French films aren't afraid of complexity. They have respect for character and the messiness of human beings. It's always great to see French films because they have this mix of feelings: sensual, intellectual and deeply personal." *For tickets and showtimes, visit affrenchfilmfestival.org*

Gracie Otto is the 2026 patron for the French Film Festival.