



Her haunting debut *Fur and Gold* has sold 100,000 copies, and was a favourite to win a Mercury prize, in a field including Arctic Monkeys, Amy Winehouse and Dizzee Rascal, and ultimately losing out to Klaxons. "I mean, I haven't gone out and got photographed outside some Soho bar with my pants hanging out," she laughs. "I'm not experiencing it in that way, because I'm private. But internally, it's been crazy. Some of the darkest times of my life so far."

These feelings have been channelled by the arrival of *Pearl* – a blonde babe of an alter-ego. Natasha talks about her as if she were a real person. This album is all about the tension between Pearl and her, she adds – she is the romance, the heightened emotions, the illusion of things. There are mysterious dreams of David Lynch-esque desert highways, those same, haunted roads we've been driving on, and burning houses. "Pearl's all about the unconscious, and instant gratification. She has diamante tears on her face... because it's painful being aware. The people that have the most pain in mythology, like Jesus, are those that get crucified by people for trying to bring them out of their illusory state. I don't profess to be that person, but I'm struggling between the two – everyone does. I'm trying to do things the right way, but it's much easier to stay drunk on illusion." Like we said, Natasha talks like this a lot.

Bat For Lashes' flamboyant sense of image-making has also seen her held up as a fashion inspiration – "I think it's hilarious when you see people's look books, and they're all like, 'We're going shamanistic next season, baby! It's all tribal stuff now', and it sometimes misses the point," she chuckles. "But it's cool, I don't care." Indeed, her past penchant for a feathered headpiece swifly sparked a flurry of teenage girls sporting Indian headbands. In mythology, anything worn around the head symbolises a connection to a higher spirit, she explains, smiling. "I wanted a ceremonial thing that I could put on that would help me get into a performance frame of mind. I'm not sure the people buying them in Hennes were thinking the same thing..." She laughs again, checking herself. "But girls in American Apparel adverts wearing headbands and leotards look really hot and sexy. It's great as an aesthetic. Everything works on different levels, doesn't it?"

We talk about her London performance at the end of 2007 – intimate and magical at times, though arguably lacking bite – and she explains how in some ways that concert marked the end of the first phase of *Bat For Lashes*, though it was all "honest, genuine and heartfelt" at the time. "There is a massive part of me that just loves to dance around, and be silly, and be physical," she adds. "And I got fed up of everyone thinking I was this mystical creature that drinks unicorns' tears for breakfast!"

"I GOT FED UP OF EVERYONE THINKING I WAS THIS MYSTICAL CREATURE THAT DRINKS UNICORNS' TEARS FOR BREAKFAST"

Opening pages and third page hooded top by **Honoree wa Burn**, bra top and shorts from **RIKAI**, shoes Natasha's own, jewellery from **Hobbes**. Previous stage pieces by **Lindsay Thornburg**, fringe collar by **Alex Sefke**. Back bra top and shorts from **Rikai**, but Natasha's own, cuff from **Pibble**. Opposite page: jewelry by **Lindsay Thornburg**.

Styling **Karen Langley**. Make-up by **Baker of Artistic Beauty**. Hair styling **William Lemon**. Styling assistant **Naama Kabanji**.



Since then, she has grown as a performer, and opening for one of the biggest rock bands in the world has had an impact, as you might expect – supporting Radiohead, she danced around the stage, her band the Blue Dreams thrusting beats, bass and guitar further to the fore than previously. Back in January 2007, Thom Yorke had posted a playlist full of "stuff that really floats my boat at the moment". "Horse and by Bat For Lashes headed up a selection that also indulged his penchant for brutalist techno and apocalyptic dubstep. That same year, he talked to a music website about that song – "I love the harpsichord and the sexual ghost voices and bowed saws," Thom pondered. "It seems to come from the world of Grimm's fairytales."

Playing with them was a challenge, but an inspiration, considers Natasha, who performed to crowds as large as 50,000. "I felt my hand and I had been taken under their wing. The audiences were really attentive, and really responded to the new songs. It was a really good thing to have between the two albums."

She turns to look out of the window, at the early afternoon sun hammering down on the dust and rocks. Nothing outside moves, except the heat itself. "I feel like I've gone out into the world, gathered all my little sticks, and now I'm coming home to make my fire."

Two months after leaving the desert behind, we reconvene in Natasha's spacious apartment in Brighton. A laptop is hooked up to a sound system, and a keyboard sits beneath the window. Rustling up some jasmine tea, she apologises for the smell of enamel paint that hangs thickly in the air. She has been working on artwork for the album, and points out a painting the record company has already rejected – Natasha and Pearl drifting in the cosmos, nude and entwined, giving birth to two planets. "I can see how people might see a bit of lezzer action!" She guffaws. "But it's all about the concept! Oh, I don't know... I think I'm going to fight for this, though."

The album is now almost finished. Many of the tracks do indeed feature cavernous, tribal drumbeats, and showcase more electronic sounds. There is more texture and range, as throbbing electro-pop nestles up to more contemplative numbers. "Last time, I did the whole thing in three weeks," she explains. "This time, it felt more like doing 12 oil paintings, really layering it up. And when you have more drums, you need more music on top."

Two Suns is again a co-production with David Kosten, although she insists that the album is very much her vision. She points to her drum programming on tracks like "Pearl's Dream" and "Daniel" as evidence of her technical skills, while her singing has

developed, too ("I was still shy on the first album," she says, modestly). She has also subtly incorporated a lot of field recordings, from singing on top of a cliff in Big Sur, to the JMJZ train pulling into Brooklyn, all captured with a hand-held recorder she has taken to carrying everywhere she goes. "I think it's essential," she explains, "because life isn't about being in an air-tight, soundproof space. Sometimes, you're almost recording silence... but it creates the space the song sits in."

"Glass" is likely to be a single at some point, with its gobby, booming horns and splintering synths, although "Daniel" is easily the most radio-friendly track on the album, rocking a rather fetching Steve Nicks-in-big-hair vibe, and will lead off.

"People might be like 'My God, what is she doing!'" she laughs. "But I always loved that cheesy 80s stuff. When I was younger, I always sang Fleetwood Mac, and 'Love is a Battlefield' by Pat Benatar! I wrote 'Daniel' one morning on my little machine, and I just wanted something I could dance round my room to, like all those songs in the past. Weirdly, I'm much more scared putting this out," she frowns, "because it's so naively pop. I feel much more vulnerable than with my weirder songs."

"But you know, I love the Karate Kid soundtrack, it's got *Bananarama's* 'Cruel Summer' on it! I've got the cheesiest piggybacks on my laptop but they make me so happy, and I just don't care if people think I'm cheesy."

We talk about loving Prince, Madonna, Talking Heads, Peter Gabriel... but also Gang Gang Dance, Portishead, Yeasayer (who have worked on some beats for the album), and Tricky. "I love hip hop. I love to go out dancing, and I love to move, and I just feel more confident creatively to try stuff like that. It's nothing new to me, it's just that I've figured out how to do the beats!"

At the other end of the sonic spectrum, Natasha lures exclusive avant-garde legend Scott Walker into contributing a vocal for a delicate final duet about a drag queen's final performance. "I really wanted a male voice on it... obviously, we thought that he would never do it. But he just e-mailed straight back and wanted to know more about the character. We talked about the book *Last Exit to Brooklyn*, and were initially going to meet up, but then he just recorded it in his studio and sent it over. He was very sweet, but I think he's just really shy. And I was really flattered because he hasn't sung like that for a long time." (Walker's ghostly croon echoes softly, contrasting with his recent preference for decidedly more challenging orchestral performances of his work, featuring a boxer pummeling a suspended pig carcass by way of percussion.)

The alter ego of *Pearl* is largely a hinted presence, rather than a defined character, although comes through strongly on "Siren Song", a track still being worked on. When

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