

#ISSUE 1

THE FUCKING L WORD



SHYSTIE
STUSH
LIONESS
SHY ONE



This issue includes interviews and photos of female Grime artists, exploring the undocumented truth of what it is like being a female within the scene inclusive of its politics and where they are today.

The peace sign

To explain this, I must explain how we, the Millennial evolved the selfie we all know and love today.

Before we had the luxury of front-facing cameras. There was the struggle, they never talk about. Yes, it is the same 'they' Khaled informed us about...but I digress.

When we were first blessed with camera phones, the original selfie of 2005 involved a stretch, a 90° palm facing hand angle whilst pressing the capture button (that wasn't always placed conveniently on the side of the phone), then further holding the phone mid-air for 2 secs whilst adjusting your peace sign and hair ribbons mentally because you couldn't really move by this point, then allowing anti-shake time of 2 seconds after capturing the image (The cooling off period). All the above being done whilst not exactly knowing how your face looked, it could've been too close, too far or may have not even captured the image because your storage only allowed 20 images and you used them all on own clothes day. The 'Blind selfie'.

Fast forward to the birth of Instagram in 2012... by 2013, the peace sign came back with attitude, seen in the illustration below. Oh it was everywhere. Back and better. That's not to say the peace sign wasn't in use. It just wasn't cool after school. The origins of the selfie peace sign can be found buried deep in the archives of many of our bebo pages filed under 'TrEw WuNz...x'.



The middle finger.

“Fuck You”.

Grime. The perfect word for the raw and vivid music culture that came from the youth of social housing, council estate culture to be specific. This evolved infectiously for others to make music throughout London and the rest of Britain.

Grime represents the socio-politics that lay heavy on the artists. Although a subculture, it is unfortunate that the female scene is still seen as a sub-strand and not an equal.

Grime is home to a sea of male MCs, where females are considered visitors. This zine is to demote any negative connotations, that females artists within the scene have not provided a groundbreaking imprint.

The Fucking 'F' word celebrates the accolades and growth that has happened and still continues today.

It is fair to say there is a segregation of the genders within the Grime scene, as there are often notable pioneers of the scene listed within publications and books on Grime with little or no mention of women. Unfortunately it is perceived that a woman can be a pioneer but only within contenders of the same sex.

This publication is not to change that, but to create awareness to new Grime listeners that there was a strong female Grime scene and the loss or lack of this community is a huge blow. This is also a gift to the veteran followers and females within Grime music, it represents an unofficial award for their efforts and what I strongly believe is long overdue.

As a result the females should also have their own encyclopedia of History.

'Don't Call Me Urban' is a photo book that was released in 2010 to represent a twelve year span of the Grime scene (1998-2010). Whilst I believed this was a great addition to the scene, the full picture wasn't achieved. A plethora of female MCs were not pictured in this book, which backs up my original point about lack of female presence.

This zine will feature five women of the original Grime scene that have blessed the sound and continue to do so. While I understand women within Grime aren't extinct today, there is a void that hasn't gone unnoticed from the 2014 renaissance of Grime.

The style of The Fuck*ng F word is relaxed. I spent the day with all the ladies, documenting from February right through until April, in their local area. Simply because I wanted the images to reflect a piece of them and where their musical influences took shape, whether it was early or late in life.

I want you as the reader to reminisce, learn, laugh and feel motivated. Being a musician myself, their stories influenced me in more ways than I can imagine. I hope it does the same for you.

-Ojerime

A person with vibrant green hair, wearing a white hoodie, is shown from the chest up. They are holding a sword horizontally in front of their face, with the blade pointing to the right. The person has a slight smile and is looking towards the camera. The background is a modern apartment building with a repeating pattern of windows and balconies. The lighting is bright, suggesting a sunny day. The text 'SHY STIE' is overlaid in the center of the image.

**SHY
STIE**

I met up with MC Shystie to discuss music, politics of the Grime scene, the world of being a woman in music and all she has achieved.

Shystie is someone you may or may not know has achieved so many things throughout her 10 plus years in music. At a young age she decided she wanted to be the next best female after Ms. Dynamite to come out of the UK, with the law of attraction and use of her talent Chanelle became the brand 'Shystie'. She isn't camera shy, so for my first shoot it was certainly a rush. Immediately all those nostalgic Grime feels were reinstated. We wandered the streets of Ponders end and even ended up in a pub with an ironing board and fogs of smoke despite the 'no smoking' sign. Once we left we were further alarmed by a barking dog behind the fence.. yes we ran, but that's not what we're here for. Our conversation went on just over an hour and we delved into so many subjects, I felt like I was speaking to a longtime friend, we laughed a lot but mostly, she was honest and open throughout our conversation.



SHYSTIE, Ponders end

"OH MY GOD, WHO'S THAT GIRL FROM HACKNEY?"



Ojerime: *Your claim to fame was in 2004 with your record 'One Wish', could you recap the opportunities that came of this? How important you feel it was to have your video on multiple TV channels like Channel U and MTV Base?*

Shystie: When 'One Wish' first came out it was only literally on Channel U, all the other stations didn't playlist it. I feel it was a bit too hard for them, they weren't use to that Grime sound, so it was really only Channel U, and they were supporting it a lot., The video was number one for weeks. MTV Base had a section for urban underground music and it got played on there at random.

O: *Wasn't MTV Base naturally set up to endorse black music?*

S: It would just get played on there once in a blue moon, I had no support on it, no radio. I was signed at the time [to Polydor], when you're signed to a major, there are all these massive artists like 50 Cent, Eminem etc, and then there was me, a new artist from the underground. The biggest artists are obviously priority, but I got limited support.

O: *Is it easy to get on TV with the music and image of being a tomboy growing up?*

S: Apart from the videos it was all good. I stood out because everyone used to be like "Oh my God, who's that girl from Hackney, she's in Adidas tracksuits"



O: It's funny you say that, I remember being in primary school and everyone being gassed about watching your video 'One Wish', were the styling decision yours or the labels?

S: That's probably my best video that I've done. I love One Wish. The way I dressed then, I was from Hackney, the tomboy, hanging out with all the boys, same way I'm dressed now just more refined. When you have popstars that go on TV, they change them up, they would say to me "Oh can you wear this and that" and I'd say no, because it wasn't me or what I was comfortable with.

O: Did Polydor embrace your personal style?

S: Yeah, they did! They just told me to dress how I want. I had a stylist with me and she would ask what I like and tailor it up to make it look a bit more refined and high end.

O: With the online progression of black music culture in the UK, for example Grime and Hip-Hop, is there regression elsewhere? For example; black music no longer supported on commercial stations, choice FM is now gone, MTV plays commercial music. Has this affected the resurgence of Grime music?

S: A little bit, but the Internet is so important and powerful. When I first came out in 2004, we didn't have YouTube, we had nothing of this sort, it was harder for me back then but I still achieved Top 40, so I thought it was sick.

Now, with the power of the Internet, it's slightly easier. These

kids don't need or care about MTV Base etc, it goes straight to YouTube. Our MTV Base and Channel U is their YouTube.

O: AJ Tracey said in an interview, that out of nowhere his music unexpectedly got embraced by radio and it motivated him to continue making music, which shows the power of the Internet.

S: Do not underestimate the power of the Internet. Build your fan base off the web. You don't need to worry about getting your video on TV because half the kids don't even watch TV anymore; they're on Twitter, YouTube and other socials.

O: I can't even remember myself, the last time I watched TV or flicked through music channels

S: I can't tell you the last time when I've sat and religiously watched TV full stop

O: Do [underground/unsigned] artists even try to get their music on TV anymore?

S: They don't need it for exposure anymore, what's mad about the Internet is that you have your Twitter, your Instagram which potentially opens you up to supporters in Brazil, Jamaica or Barbados and they can reach out to you directly via these platforms, it's a million times more powerful than ,lets say, a UK TV channel.

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**IF YOU'RE SICK,
YOU'RE SICK.**
there should be
no (brackets) //

O: It's true, because back then, you had to manually plug your music into these countries right?

S: That's right but now, BAM! Straight onto the Internet. Other countries can just get it straight away. Supporters can reach out and just tweet you. Back in the day, do you know how hard it would be to get in contact with Mega Man, So Solid or to talk to Ms Dynamite? It was really star-ish, if you got to speak to these artists it was like "Oh my God" . Now, people are just @ing their favourite artists. These kids will be online trolling artists live and direct too, it's mad.

O: Do you feel there are any negative sides to the Internet/ social network?

S: I think the negative thing for an artist now is that people online feel they can just talk to you anyhow. They aren't aware of the work you put in. The other day I saw these 'just come' Grime fans disrespecting Tinchy Stryder and I got pissed off , I'm like "Are you stupid? Tinchy has been doing this for time and has so many hits under his belt, these lot need to do their research and have manners".

O: You're right, I feel there is a negative side to the Internet I don't think people realise when you catch an artist at the wrong moment you don't know what damage you're doing.

How do you feel about the term 'Femcee' 'Female MC' or 'A chick who can spit?'...Okay I made that last one up

S: [laughs] It's annoying because, I know I'm better than a lot of guys. I know this emcee may not have made better songs than I have, I know this person isn't performing on stages I'm performing at. Don't segregate it as females and males. No we're all doing this together. If I am good I'm good. Lioness, she's sick. You'll hear "Kano's sick", then something like "Nolay's sick for a girl huh? "Why can't she just be sick?" I feel, if you're sick, you're sick. There should be no brackets.

O: Even in [American] Hip Hop, you don't hear titles as much, once someone is good, the female tag isn't thrown out. Lil Kim, Foxy Brown, Nicki Minaj...

S: They get called out with the big boys. It's true, you don't hear 'Kim's good for a female'.

O: I feel it's the development. I made a comparison to Hip Hop and Grime in my dissertation. They aren't the same genre but their origins are similar, an impoverished background influenced by Jamaican culture and male dominated.

O: Do you feel the female Grime scene is as strong as the original Grime scene? Where there were much more of you.

S: When we first came out, there were loads of girls. Everyone was on it. We're females, so some want to settle down, some wanna have children. For the guys, they can continue running around. I haven't had children yet so I can't speak on being a mother. If you can find a balance and still maintain both, then wicked but a lot of girls either can't or lose interest.

O: There are different pressures on women.

S: The pressures on women are completely different. You hear "Why aren't there any females around? Why aren't they on it?" It's because they have different priorities.

O: Do you feel the rap scene is more popular with women in the UK; we have Little Simz, Leshurr, Banks, Paigey. Do you feel the rap sound has taken over than the Grime sound and maybe that's where women are taking their Grime roots to?

S: Yeah, even with my stuff I don't always just do Grime. I do dance [music], I do Hip Hop. If I go to the studio and they play something that bangs, I'm just like "I want to jump on that" it doesn't have to be just 140BPM [Grime tempo]. I feel that's because I've travelled a lot. I've supported Basement Jaxx and The Streets, I get to see the different crowds and how they react. I'm an energy person when I'm on stage. I'm jumping around and I'm running out of breath. I take different things from different places and try to infuse that into my music.

Sometimes I hear a Grime beat and can't express myself how I would on Dance and vice versa. I try to switch it up.

O: I watched an interview where you described your modelling and acting career. Do you feel the accolades you've achieved from this have been celebrated enough?

S: No. They're not.

O: I did see the Nazir Mazhar catwalk but I I didn't know you did more than that

S: I did three years. I did the first year with Nazir for London fashion week. Then I flew to New York for the second one. A designer in America hit up my manager, he designs sunglasses for Rihanna, Gaga and Beyonce, his name is Stevie Boy, he wanted to fly over to meet me as he was a fan and wanted to give me some glasses. We met up in restaurant in Camden. He just looked at me and says to my manager "I want her. I want her in New York fashion week". We flew out to America and I did NYFW [2012] It was filmed on VH1, it was so sick. We did Hot 97 interviews out there.

O: Shystie, they don't want you to win [DJ Khaled voice] I didn't know all of this!

S: They don't wanna hear about me winning. [Laughs] we came back and we did LFW again the following year. I don't think it gets spoken about enough or people don't know. This is why I haven't got time for anyone who says, "You haven't done your work," I just tell them to fuck off [laughs].

O: Do you feel you would be as successful in Grime if you came out today and would you like it more?

S: I have no regrets. I feel would I have made 'One Wish', would I have had the same videographers to have done that video. To me, 'one wish' is timeless, it's a classic to me. I appreciate where I've come from and what I done back then.

O: The subjects you spoke on were very real as well. Hollie and Jessica for example. That's something weren't putting in songs. Growing up Americans were making tribute songs on fresh issues.

S: At the time it was like the Maddie scenario, it was all over the news. I'm glad I came out when I did. I'm transitioning into the newer era of the internet and newer kids and newer beats.

O: Is it as necessary to look good today as a female artist as it previously was?

S: When I first came out, you could dress how you want. Wear a hoody, I used to wear Adidas. Now it is a bit more sexed up. Look at Nicki Minaj, but still in the UK it's different because we're a bit more reserved, you won't see girls with their bum out twerking because people would put them down over here. Image is very important as a women and a guy.

O: Guys got away with it for a long time but not anymore.

S: You have to have your image on point because you need to look good, you need to be marketable and you need your target audience to relate to you. Your music needs to match your image too. I can't have my ass out and be talking rough, it doesn't correlate. Just be you.

O: Is it necessary to still see that side to females today? There are still some people who are very tom-boyish with their look.

S: Little Simz is 21, When I came out I was probably like her. She's tom-boyish . She has polo necks and the trousers and her trademark look, but she looks feminine. Give her time and she might change or might not

O: I feel she's very rigid with her style. With sponsors and brands coming up they endorse and embrace artists' styles a lot more, like Adidas and Stormzy. I know Simz buys some of her clothes from skate companies, so they may gift her.

S: You loyal baby have some more of this [Dj Khaled voice]

O: [laughs]

S: I don't think she has to show her boobs, it's whatever she's comfortable with, she doesn't have to fit any boxes.

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**LITTLE SIMZ IS 21
WHEN I CAME OUT
I WAS PROBABLY LIKE HER**

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O: What was it like at that time [2004] in the industry, what were positives and negatives you had to deal with?

S: I basically started at 17 in school, I did the Dizzee Rascal 'I Luv U', which got me signed, from then I was always on pirate radio stations and around a lot of artists. I was Heat FM, Déjà vu, Freak FM and I used to do sets. I was signed, then my album came out in 2004, then I went on tour. Positives were that there weren't a lot of females around; there was Dynamite and Stush. I studied the game so much. Mainly Ms Dynamite I remember thinking, "This girl is local, she is on my TV, I want to be the next female that everyone is talking about". If she can do it why can't I. She was spitting a little slower so I wanted to spit a bit faster.

When I got signed, that was a positive because there weren't females doing Grime so that's why they're like "Shystie, the first lady of Grime". Negatives were when I first started it was hard to get on pirate radio, I remember asking "Can I come on" and all I got was no's, so when they did live phone-ins I would ask them if I could spit a lyric, then I'd do it and they'd be like "rah you can spit you should come down" and that's how I got onto other radio stations.

O: Do you think that's because you were a female?

S: Yeah definitely, because there were so many guys. I sent so many TDK tapes to people pressed up, I wrote a bio and nothing happened. Nowadays, the kids can just put it on Soundcloud.

O: As a female our bodies are always going through change. Emotional stress, mental stress. Have your moods and interpretations of scenarios been effected because of this?

S: In general I'm like that, just before my period I become so sensitive, I feel like someone can something to me or my friend and I can reply "What do you mean by that". I take the smallest thing so personal.

O: Which can make or break you in this industry

S: With women, we have to go through that, guys don't have to. It can affect you. My manager knows when I'm like that "Okay just get so those songs over to me when you can.. and erm.. rest up" [laughs]. He knows when to leave me, because we've been working together for so long [laughs]

O: How do you feel about declaring you're a female in music and being the ambassador of female empowerment?

S: I've embraced it. The brand 'Shystie' is about female empowerment, it's about uplifting women and men.

O: I like hearing your reply tracks, where you speak on how men address women.

S: I don't like writing songs about nothing. It has to be about content I like to write and know I could potentially change someone's life for the better. Someone's messaged me that they wanted to kill themselves and they've listened to my song. People write thank you letter saying my song has changed their life. My lyrics are tattooed on people.

I was a little girl living in Hackney, I can write a song that potentially could save someone's life. I use the position I'm in for the better. To uplift. I rep the gyal dem.



O: The Grime scene can be a challenging place to well in. What things do you watch out for? Is it love/hate?

S: I don't really friend up too much. I've had two altercations with girls ready. I really separate myself from making friends because they're not your friends. You may get the odd 1 or 2 who you can build friendships with but I just want to go to studio and do my work. If someone has good energy I will work with them. Me and Lioness, I class her as a friend over music, she comes to my family functions, I go to hers. She's cool we catch so much joke, so Lioness and Jamelia. Have your friends outside of music because they are the ones who will hold you down.

O: Is your sexuality questioned?

S: It is so crazy. I performed at Heaven gay club. This was first time performing at a gay club so the promoter said "You have so many gay fans, it is unbelievable, this venue has never been so packed out for an artist before and it's rumoured that you're straight" I was like "It's not a rumour firstly, it's a fact I'm straight" she was like "Oh wow there's going to be a lot of disappointment".

This was in 2008, I think it's because it's a female doing something that's seen as boyish. Some female artists are lesbians, but I love men, I love the stupid things about men. It doesn't really matter what my preference is, love who you love and be happy, whether you're straight, bi, gay whatever, if you're a supporter of my music, then it's all love.

O: What would have you achieved that I should include in the zine?

S: I'd say, modelling, dubplate drama, 3 seasons. My manager and I got together to create this, got it on channel 4, we were only meant to have 30K viewers but ended up with 3 million. The aim was to put grime on TV across the UK and get the best of the best acts on there to showcase themselves and spread the scene to cities and places that may not have been clued up, about some of the artist and how things may operate. I toured. I was in a video game with my own character, been in movies and created songs for their soundtracks too. Kidulthood, Adulthood and The Film SKET.

Meeting with Shy One was an education within itself. She introduced me her collection of rare cassette tapes from Grime sets and vocal recordings dating as far back as 2004.

We spoke about everything under the sun, from Grime to our parents, mental illness, the impact of London and back into Grime all with a smile on our face. Small in stature like myself, she was extremely photogenic, very easy to get on with and showed me her South Harrow block, which I really admired architecturally along with her flat, which was a cozy representation of her and her mother's personalities.

Shy one, now 26, entered the Grime scene at 14. Her production skills really stood out as the sound was described as 'weird' and 'different' amongst the community, though listed as unconventional in the big book of Grime's unwritten rules, her tempo was 140 and her passion was to release similarly to what other producers would within this Shy found a group of friends where she could place her sound and respect her craft.





**SHY
ONE**

Ojerime: What were the highlights of being a producer in the early days of Grime (2003– 2008)?

Shy One: I feel like Grime was a lot more experimental. People were trying different things. Creating something new and not making what they think sounds like 'Grime'. There was an era of the classical Chinese influence on beats (I Luv U Pt 2) and the violins/orchestral sounds (Stimpy, Scru face, Mr Slash, Low deep etc).

O: One of the questions in my dissertation [*A comparison of the original Grime in London to its revival today*] was 'Are there any unwritten rules within Grime' and I found there were so many. Influencers within the scene could slow down a movement in the scene, for example: Logan Sama denouncing the term 'R&G' (rhythm and Grime) and people within the scene speaking on what constitutes towards being a Grime song.

S: I feel Grime stunts its own growth sometimes, the closed-mindedness. From what I've heard recently, it's all about nostalgic beats, sampling from old iconic tunes. Before, it wasn't about recreating or mimicking sounds from the past. The genre didn't come about by doing what others have done or playing it safe.

O: Do you believe privilege comes into place? I don't mean money, I mean access to equipment and software. The new age of technology has allowed so many more people to make music and unfortunately these attributes can stunt a developing genre.

S: It can get oversaturated; it's inevitable with the growth of something's popularity. Grime is still a young genre. In order to be a producer or DJ, you either had to graft or be privileged because this equipment aint cheap. I was lucky enough to have DJs in my family; my Godfather bought me my first pair of decks when I was 13. I bought my Technics off the Rewind forum, everything else; my CDJs and mixers, I've been blessed enough to have hand-me-downs from my Dad. I would not have any of that if I didn't have those connections because that shit is expensive and in my living situation there's no way I could ever financially prioritise them over food/rent/travel.

O: You hid your identity during your Grime days, was there a reason for this?

S: Yes! I used to be called 'Malicious' when I first got my decks. I wanted to make beats and not have everyone know it's me. I was aware of the prejudice against females and generally self-conscious of anything I did especially as my dad's show was on MTV at the time. I put a cartoon as my face because I didn't want people in the ends to know it's me, I wanted to get fresh ratings and unbiased opinions and that's why I called myself 'Shy One' because I thought "What's a quick name?" and it bloody stuck and I'm so pissed.

O: I like it!

SHY ONE, South Harrow





S: I hate it; I just wanna be called Mali. The only reason my face is now on my Twitter is because of DVA. He got back in contact with me in 2012, after I'd stopped making beats. He said "the hiding your face thing is played out and you need to show it now" but I still weren't with it, so we muddled my face for the EP artwork like a mosaic [laughs]. Someone even re-juggled it, so that they could see what my face looks like.

O: *Has anyone assumed you're a guy because your name didn't have a 'lady' or 'Miss'?*

S: Definitely! I had that even more so when I didn't show my face even though my image was a cartoon woman. They just assumed straight away. Majority of my emails have been like 'Yo bruv'. The kind of music I'm playing, speaking over radio, it doesn't help that I have a very deep voice for a woman, so people assumed I was a guy for ages. Even recently I've had people say "Oh, what Shy One's a girl?!"

O: [laughs] I assumed you were a female when I heard your name, I suppose it's just perspective.

S: I'd get 'She's sick for a girl'. My mum worked in a youth club in W10, so part of my growing up was around there. That's where I first learned how to DJ, where some of Musical Mob would go. I used to hold it up, I'd be the smallest tiniest woman in the room and there was another female DJ who I have to big up, I've been dying to know where she is now, I used to look up to her so much, her name was Zeus and that was her real name!

O: Have you found her since?

S: No I haven't but she was a G. She must have been from West, her and Shepherd would give me tips on mixing. There were the odd females about [in Grime] but I think they were put off or got bored.

O: I think with the lack of social media back then it was harder to track down people after you'd left their presence. There wasn't a hub for artists, apart from MySpace. Now there's Twitter which works better as a forum.

O: *Is there anything you've produced that you thought more would've come of?*

S: I never think that my sounds will take me to another level but a track that I thought would have got more love is a Grime track on the Big Dada compilation (2013).

Joe Muggs from The Guardian hit me up and asked me to get involved. This was first track where I've sat down and said 'I'm going to make some Grime'. I really like this beat. I called the track '927' because of Freeze FM which was 92.7FM. It's probably the most normal Grime track I've made.





O: I understand you no longer solely make Grime music, is there a reason for this?

S: In my opinion quality control went out of the window and guys were getting brought in and just ruining sets. I stopped keeping up with radio, and sets in 2009. I still love Grime, I still make it, I can't help it. [Shy plays 'beans' taken off the 'Other side' EP] Now I just do what I want, I'm free. My material now, it's got that funk, soulful vibe. Looking back I don't really think I ever made Grime beats, I would send them to Grime MCs and they would always find them weird and different. It got to a point where I realised I don't listen to just Grime music. I listen to Jazz, soul, broken beat and reggae.

O: Which is no surprise considering your parents rich taste in music.

S: Everyone assumes that because I'm Trevor Nelson's daughter that it comes from him when it has nothing to do with him. I've always lived with my mum and it's her records that would play, me and her would drive around. So she schooled me in music and has wicked taste. She knows more about Grime than I do at the moment. She listens to 1Xtra religiously and puts me on to new music.

O: [laughs] My mum is similar, she informs me on documentaries on Grime and popular music.

S: I love that! I realised I listened to a mixture of sounds. At the time when I dropped that first EP (2012) I stopped

listening to so much Grime and started revisiting Hip Hop and all my mum's music. I got into Jazz and you can hear that. Now I make music with no restraint and that's the same with DJing. I'm not a genre specialist and I can't be. My mantra in life is: 'Don't force it'.

O: I know you're not too involved in the current scene at the moment, but from the bits you are informed on, how do you feel about it?

S: I haven't been too interested in anyone new to be honest. Kwam and Nico Lindsay (FKA 'Problem') are two I've respected from back when we used to chat and send tunes on MSN, Shouts to Capo Lee too. Rocks is the man and big up Jack Dat, I love his passion. I would go by Radar often and Jack Dat would be there religiously, he puts in graft.

O: I'm hearing great things about and from him, I heard him on the BBC 1Xtra set in February.

S: I really rate him, I was so happy to see that he'd been picked up by an agency. He loves it and is egoless as well. Not afraid to say he rates someone and Grime is just ridiculous with that. Rocks does his own thing, it's the same with Kwam and Nico Lindsay. They're more lyricists. I'm anti, so when everyone's talking about someone, I can't help but be reluctant to listen. Just for the fact that everyone likes it, means that it's probably not that good. It's not a good mentality to have.

O: I've had this discussion recently, there's a celebration of mediocrity at the moment

S: Most mainstream stuff is shit, I'd prefer to find a singer on SoundCloud who probably recorded it her wardrobe and that's usually way better.

O: That's why I rate Abra to be honest, so authentic.

S: She's wavey, I saw her live. One artist's hype that I can believe is Stormzy, he's got the delivery, the cadence, the presence and the voice. Novelist I checked out also. Out of what I've heard from the new Grime scene, I'd say; Rocks, Jack Dat and Kwam, from day dot. With me, I've got to relate. I've got to believe you if it's about the girls you're getting or straps and that then no. That's why Kwam is a G

O: Play me some Kwam then!

S: [Plays Kwam-2011] He is an intelligent man, I can relate to I can't relate to some songs from other artists, often it's like 'yeah I smoke weed'. Tell me something different! Like the electric key in your mum's yard, because I know it needs topping up.

O: [laughs] oh my gosh, become an MC please!

S: It's real. I love that Cas is spitting about shotting but also doing lines, because it's realistic and he doesn't give a fuck or care about face. He's giving you the honest truth about both sides of the game.

O: Would you say 'conscious Grime'?

S: I hate that when anything's real it means it's 'conscious'. It should just be genuine. I hate this whole 'conscious' 'deep' 'woke' because it's what we should be, aware.

O: How do you feel about producers today duplicating the original Grime sound, for example using old school Eski beat kits?

S: It's played out. It's played to absolute death. For example if I was to sample a few Eski sounds now I'd put them on the machine and I would put an effect or distort the sounds, so you can still use them old sounds but try something new, make a new instrument out of them. It's lazy in my opinion, sometimes it can bang because we all love an edit or a bootleg, and bootlegs are a huge part of Grime. I've got a bag of white label, so I can't chat shit about recycling sounds but it's lazy and trying to use a formula. Everyone's trying to crowd please nowadays and I'm the exact opposite, which shows.

O: Do you think there will be any new female producers on the Grime scene, anyone you're witnessing come up? As we know the female MC scene isn't very big at the moment.

S: Anyone who I've known that makes beats and happens to have a womb in Grime has branched out a bit, I'm one of them. We've evolved and sounds grows with us. For example: Secaina Hudson, she is now signed to Capitol records; writing, singing and producing Pop/R&B sounds. Mizz beats, her Grime was never formula, it was always a bit left as well and now she's working with Tiffany Gouche and the LA beat scene, she pisses me off because she doesn't tell anyone!

O: [laughs] I fully had no idea of this.

S: There is Nightwave, she used to be called '8bitch' but it wasn't Grime, she makes like 150BPM stuff. Ikonica, Jubilee.. Yeah there's not that many.

O: I mentioned this to Shystie, a lot of the women who are at the forefront of UK underground music tend to be rappers that dabble in Grime but predominately pursue rap and R&B

S: I think it's because now we have a surge of Grime female DJs but not producers and it's because it's a big commitment. To make beats you're locked away for hours on your own. No one wants to hear you go through snares for ten minutes or hear you play with a kick and play a loop for one hour. I don't think just anyone is down for it.

O: A.G said something similar about the DJ scene, if they had to grind the way she did when she first started, a lot of people wouldn't survive. Years back, a Choice FM DJ, made a joke on air, referring to how hard it was using vinyl and how today, it's too easy to achieve the title 'DJ' with the use of buttons and controls.

S: A lot of girls wouldn't because there's nothing glamorous about it. If you look at producers, they are the ones who don't really dance or turn up a lot of the time. They are introverts, stoners, spend a lot of time inside and our relationships never work.

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**IF YOU LOOK AT PRODUCERS...
THEY ARE INTROVERTS, STONERS,
SPEND A LOT OF TIME INSIDE AND
OUR RELATIONSHIPS NEVER WORK**

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O: Being a woman, our bodies go through constant hormonal changes, has this affected you as a producer?

S: It's contributed because I've been unfortunate enough to have a condition [PCOS: polycystic ovary syndrome] and it fucks up my hormones and mood. I also suffer with anxiety and depression, so those two things have affected music and my life more than anything else so that's the reason for my lack of productivity, releases, continuity and shit communication. I have a reputation for that; I've still not Whatsapped people back from weeks ago. I wouldn't say that's down to just being a woman, it's down to being a woman with PCOS and this isn't doing me great [points to weed] no actually it's doing me great [hugs container of Weed].

O: [laughs] Is it best for the moment? I'm aware It's not for everyone. I know if I became a fulltime stoner I'd lose everybody, I'd even lose my home and I don't even own one.

S: Self-medicating is a weird thing. Being a woman contributes but it's not only that; you've got other things. Although men won't go through a hormonal disease there's mental illness. I do know that from the women I know in Grime, they do go through their shit as well, with women we bare a lot of shit. Especially black women, I feel a lot deal with mental illness and don't realise because it's not addressed, it's a stigma in our community. It's called the white man disease, when I was younger, I used to say to my mum "I don't understand the stupid grungers in school who are depressed, cutting themselves. They're ediats!" Then I got a bit older and it all kicked in and I understood it more, shit got real.



O: I understand you are behind the scenes. How has it been being a female producer?

S: You're always going to be patronised. Now they won't say it as much but you'd hear 'You're good for a girl'. Now it can be an advantage it's like "Oo you're girl who does this" You're doing something that you're a minority in ,so it can shine light on you for that reason. I don't think there's been more of an advantage or disadvantage or maybe I'm just in my own world and oblivious. When I was doing my thing from 2004, it was bad, you're not taken seriously even now as a woman in music unless you're singer. I would come up to the club with my records and laptop and say to the bouncer I'm playing tonight and their like 'No you're not' and that you're trying to enter the club for free.

O: Like you'd carry that much to dance in the club [laughs]

S: You know what I mean, it's still bullshit and people are still less likely to check you out or book you, unless you've got a sex image and mandem wanna come out and chirps you. So it is an advantage and a hindrance dependent on what kind of woman you are and what you want out of it.

O: True, some people aren't in it for the long run and just the heat of the moment.

O: While we were shooting, you had mentioned money raised for charities, that's something I'd love the readership to be aware of, could you touch on this.

S: I have done sponsored walks for charities inclusive of the MS therapy centre in Harrow, I walked 21 miles: From Stanmore to North Greenwich and another where I walked from Uxbridge to Southgate for ACLT [African Caribbean Leukaemia trust]





Lioness is someone I'd describe as having tamed confidence; through her music she has a cool, calm tone and casually makes us aware how strong of a musician she is, which I admire.

Lioness has released a strong catalogue of music and freestyles. Having been on a musical Hiatus since 2012, her name still hasn't left people's lips. I spent the afternoon with her in Deptford, South London, a place I know very well. I shot images of her behind the famous market, Creekside and even made time to grab Mc Donald's. I learned a lot and laughed so much. It was important I heard live and direct what music means to Lioness, as it moved me.



LIONESS



Ojerime: The first track I remember hearing from you was 'Rep Ur Endz – South' with L-Man and your cousin Bear man. Coming from South London, recognising a lot of the places in the music video.

You entered the original Grime scene at 14, what was the scene like for you personally?

Lioness: There was no thought process, so when I entered the scene, everything was fun. I followed my cousin because that's who inspired me to get into it, my brother used to spit as well and I would go and listen to all my cousin's sets in their homes and go with them to pirate radio stations.

O: Did males outweigh females during this time?

L: A lot of males! You had Ms. Dynamite, you had Stush and that was it! And then you had Shy [Shystie] but I never really thought, "I wanna be like them". I looked at them like "Rah they're doing their thing".

I looked up to my cousins and my brothers; I see the graft, I see you lot waking up early to go and do this set and I was like "yeah! This is fun".

How I got into writing was, I came back from school and I was angry. I wrote about it and it so happened to rhyme. Then I was like "This is fun".

The scene around that time [2005] was healthy and you never expect to get anywhere with it. It was ends based, so if I'm doing music, I'm in it for the love. If someone hears it then that's great, but you're not doing it so people can hear it, you're doing it because you love it. The mind-set was "If it gets out there, it gets out there".

O: A.G explained that there was a time where the Grime scene was segregated and looking back on it, it truly was. Which can stunt the growth of something new, because South in itself was not enough and London is a hub of opportunities.

L: I'll never forget, I had beef with a girl. She lived in Lewisham "Blue borough", I was in Greenwich "Green borough", when you're doing music but from green and not blue, people are not going to want to work with you. To most people then Greenwich is Woolwich and no one would separate the two, so if you're a part of Greenwich you're automatically "Woolwich youts".

O: I remember the term "Woolwich Youts" [laughs]. Do you think this rivalry came from male culture? Or do you think it was equally shared?

L: I don't think it's a "woman thing" it's got to do a lot with males. If you hang with this set of males, you're affiliated.



LIONESS, Deptford

O: There were a lot of young female gangs from what I remember. No youth could really enter Peckham at one point without drama.

L: Peckham girls! I was in Peckham with Queenie years back. All these girls approached us like “What you doing in the endz fam?” we’re confused because I believe we were only there to see someone’s family member. They [the girls] brought out knives, kitchen knives!

O: Just over someone standing in land, peacefully.

L: Yes! Land. It was a mad time.

O: Explain further what is was like when you were in the scene of that time

L: It was definitely a mandem thing, when I came across other girls that spat that weren’t Ms. Dynamite, Stush or Shystie, it was odd to me, especially if they were from ends too. For example, Queenie, I think was from South-West [London]. I would go to a studio and she would be there. I was confused like “Rah you do this as well?” and she was on a thing of “Yo! it’s the dopest girl MC in South” and I’m like “uh! I’m dope as well [laughs]”.

O: I believe clothes were fun too, I re-watched the ‘Rep Ur Endz – South” video and was blown away by how acceptable the fashion was of that time [laughs]!

O: Then you did the Mary. J switch-up with your hair. In one scene, It was long and in another it was short! I watched the video and said this reminds me of Mary J’s family affair visual, where she unapologetically changes her hair length throughout.

L: ah! [Laughs] that wasn’t intentional. One day it was weave, the other day it was like [to the director]: “Oh you need extra shots? What do you mean? I aint got the weave in no more!”

O: What attention did ‘Rep Ur Endz’ [2005] receive, as this was playlisted on Channel U?

L: It didn’t make me level to Bear man in any way shape or form. But if you said Bear man, you’d say Lioness too, so opportunities came off the back of that. I went on KISS 100 with Bear for Logan’s show and we did a set together and that was my first professional radio experience, that got me into the ears of Grime listeners and that was the biggest show at the time. It did do a lot for me and made me feel that I could par with the mandem and that I shouldn’t be placed separately with other girls.

O: How were you made aware of the success of your music, given that social media was different to how it is now?

L: I had a MySpace account with a healthy amount of traffic, I had one of my songs on there, 'Frigg The Chorus' [2006], I listen back to the songs of that time and I'm so embarrassed! But I have to big up MySpace, because that's all we could use to get our music out there. I even think that's how Lady Leshurr hollered me back in the day; you could link with people who were outside London. The only other thing we really had was MSN messenger but you had to know the person, you couldn't just holla at someone from Birmingham. Big up Tom who started the social media wave [laughs]

O: At what point did you realise you were special? I've noticed that whilst we had Ms. Dynamite, Stush and Shystie to kickstart the sound, your name reoccurs in any discussion about female Grime MCs up until today.

L: Well the girl from Lewisham I told you about previously, was chatting shit outside Yate's in Lewisham

O: Oh wow, I remember the Yates! Growing up, I'd always say I wanted to get there when I'm old enough to drink and it was a gym before I could even touch 18 [laughs]

L: Listen! Yates was the spot, you missed out [laughs] But I had beef with this girl and she made a dub for me, I didn't think much of it really

O: [laughs] You still look disappointed now.

L: Because it was! I don't know even know why she even came for me. I had to respond and normally I'd have my brother to approve my bars were okay or tell me if they're dead but unfortunately we were beefing at the time. I had to write this and I had no one to ask but I had to get this dub out so I wrote it and bunked school to go and record it. When I dropped it, my brothers and cousins thought it was amazing and I felt I had done that all by myself, I didn't need approval and got there in the end. To be fair in music, I go missing all the time so I don't know how I managed to stay in the same light all these years.

O: I mentioned that we'd be doing this interview and I had people throwing memories of when they first heard you, how great you are and that you should make a return. I believe it's not always based on how much you release but the quality of what you do.

O: Could you explain the timeline from 'Grab that Mic' right up until your last 2011 mixtape 'Roariness'.

L: Originally, I was in a group called 'Mastermind trooperz' which included my cousins and my brother. They did a video for Channel U and I was on the end of that, so that's how I came about. Before that, I was pursuing dance and I would go to shows and have people say "Oh wow I didn't know you spit", so from that I started doing talent shows. Although different from dance, I met someone who suggested I jump on 'Grab that mic' and there were so many girls there! I can't even tell you what year this was but I know I was a teenager and I definitely bunked school to be there.



O: How did you end up at your last project? I understand from 'Grab that Mic' that came out roughly in 2004, there were gaps leading up to your hiatus in 2012

L: I would always do music but it was a hobby. I was at school but had to my SATS and GCSEs, so I went missing. After finishing school, I met Suge through my cousin Doctor. He's a manager, worked closely with Wiley and he informed me that remixes were the way forward, so I did a few. Of course Shystie did the original remix of Dizzee's 'I Luv U' in 2004, so he wanted stuff similar to that. I worked alongside him and I made a mixtape called 'Lochness monster' and those were the days when I was hungry to make music and it was fun.

I then went to university and made a remix of Drake's 'Over' [2010] titled 'Good for a girl'. Ace [BBC 1Xtra DJ 2004-2012] heard it and contacted me on Facebook. I remember being in the library at the time and the message read, "I really wanna manage you, I think we can make it work".

Once the Lochness monster was completed, Suge and I parted ways but I was definitely about in music more, so my name was definitely in people's mouths. Wiley is the sort of the person that will hear your name buzzing and will look into you, then tell you to roll with him. He heard the remixes I did of his and Ghetts songs, so I started rolling with Wiley. I'd go to the studio with him and he invited me to the MOBO's but I had people tell me that Wiley's the type of person that would invite you somewhere and you won't be able to get through to him.

O: [laughs] You'll be in your dangly earrings and dress...

L: Exactly! Dangly earrings, dress, heels but no Wiley

O: Little Dee even tweeted, "if Wiley's never sold you a dream you've still got more work to do" [laughs]

L: It's the truth! I was watching his interview for 'Not For the Radio' and he said himself, that he would organise things with people then when people call him, they'll hear the dial tone is in another country. But I did get to Liverpool for the MOBOs, I phoned him and he picked up! I think because I'm a girl he knew it'd be bad [laughs]

O: I wouldn't tell anybody I went, if he didn't show up at the station. No one would know, they'd all think I was at home in London [laughs]

L: [laughs] When Ace approached me for management, I really thought about it. He said "I think you can really do this, you've not taken it seriously and you've just done it because you can, but if you do take it seriously you can go somewhere with it" I thought about it more, then dropped out of uni and pursued music full-time in 2010. That's how 'Roarness' was released in 2011. I found that when I did music full-time; the fun got sucked out of it.

O: Especially if you're being controlled.



L: yeah and they're looking at what's been successful for other people and applying that onto you.

O: What I found interesting was during that time, a lot of UK artists were being signed by labels that didn't have the know how of successfully promoting an underground artist, without ruining their integrity. A lot of commercial decisions and old school label methods were applied where it would simply not work. They may start well then it gets too polished.

L: That's the truth and exactly what happens. You get so many opinions and then everything changes. I started to say to myself "I don't like this anymore", and it wasn't what I signed up for. Then the focus moved from my music and talent to my appearance and skin complexion. People started saying "If she was "light skin", she'd be better" what does that mean?

O: Such ignorance. I'm happy you've touched on this subject, colourism is an issue and it's necessary we are constantly made aware of its presence within the industry.

L: It's key and because I started to notice that, I became less confident in life and at that time, a lot of people assumed I was older when in actual fact, I was quite young so that actually affected me. I was wearing tracksuits, as I became more sexual as a female then I would wear heels and dresses. But there was more an emphasis on what I should be, "Oh you shouldn't wear tracksuits, or you shouldn't do this or do that". Then you start taking all that shit on board and it clouds everything you came to do, which was to just make music. So I started to not like it and believed it was dead and that's why no one heard from me. Then other personal things started happening in my life that knocked me further. Of course Grime is popping again and I hear "You should come back", I'm not going to come back just because Grime's working again.

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**I STARTED TO SAY TO MYSELF...
I DON'T LIKE THIS ANYMORE
THE FOCUS MOVED FROM MY MUSIC
AND TALENT TO SKIN COMPLEXION**
”

L: It's not because it's popping. I want to come back because I miss my voice, that's my outlet. So many things have happened to me when I stopped in 2012 until now, 2016. There's so much that I've got to talk to everyone about. Life is real and shit really hit the fan and went across the room.

O: That's something I hope this zine translates. We as women of the music industry are holding ourselves together to show you the best of us. We go through monthly cycles, we have children, we are battling our hormones, taking birth control and so on. It's not to highlight our struggle because it's not all about that but to create additional awareness.

O: Eminem and Ghetts were your influences, which you mentioned in a 2011 interview with Urban Development (UD). This makes sense, as they are both lyrical powerhouses. How did this help you sonically?

L: I like them two because they do certain things in their songs and it reminds me of myself. I'm not saying we're the same level but the way they construct their bars and put things together, relate to how I would do it. With Ghetts and Eminem, I don't listen to them everyday but they are my favourites forever, just for those reasons, I feel like I can relate to the thought-process behind their music. People ask me if I looked up to Lauryn Hill or Lil Kim.

O: At 14, did you find you had to showcase your femininity through your dress sense?

L: When I first came out, I knew nothing about image and didn't know how I was meant to come across. I wasn't paying attention to any of that because I thought, "I do music because that's what I like to do and if you don't then it's whatever".

O: It's a reflection of the times; I remember secondary school was about wearing Primark or sports brands.

L: It was calm! You might have on a tracksuit or stretch jeans

O: [bursts out in laughter] You said that in such a Jamaican way I remember stretch jeans!

L: You may slick your hair or put a lollipop in it. I begged my mum in year 5 to relax my hair! But during that time in Grime there wasn't any pressure and as I said before, it wasn't until I became more sexual; I would fling on a heel or be more dressed up. It was odd because guys would complain and say a lot of the girls were dressing like mandem, then say we're girls and we should dress so. In the scene you even had people dictating how "urban" people should dress and loads of stupid opinions would flood in.

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**YOU MIGHT HAVE ON A TRACKSUIT
OR STRETCH JEANS.
... SLICK YOUR HAIR OR PUT A
LOLLIPOP IN IT**

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O: One thing that stood out about you right up until your hiatus was presenting yourself as a woman making music and no longer a young girl. This was through your dress sense, commonly piecing the black blazer, tight trousers and heels together as well as the subjects mentioned in your music, could you explain this era?

L: Black is my absolute favourite. Going into Roarness [2011] this was a time when everyone in the industry cared about their image. I didn't want to do what everyone else was doing; at that time you'd wear a leggings, colourful pattern and a blazer. At that time my complexion was a big deal, so I just put more black in your face as I stopped caring. All of that affected me as a person and when you see how deep the effects are on you, you realise there's a deeper psychology behind why you do certain things

O: Do you believe calling yourself an artist redefines what genre of music you enter and leaves you open to play with more?

L: As I grow, there are more topics to talk about and I can't always tell you over Grime because it's not going to convey the same message and you may not understand what's going on. If I was a guy, I'd still do grime because I can tell you about the girl I like and how I have kids now but as a female I've got to tell you everything, you need to understand the menstrual cycle, the things I'm experiencing and why I'm crying for no reason but I can't necessarily just do that on Grime. I don't want you to bob your head when you could be listening, For me, music has always been an outlet and if I'm

providing you a message I'm going to do that the best way I can.

O: I've noticed there is a pattern emerging through speaking to all the women in the zine and it's that more of you have outgrown Grime to become more versatile, taking those influences to other genres where you feel you can express yourselves easier.

L: I don't want people to make the assumption that I'm above Grime or don't need Grime. I'm just getting older, when I was 14 that was all I was listening to and life wasn't deep for me then. Now things have happened to me, there are more ways to say it.

O: Do you feel your regular breaks from music have affected you in any way?

L: My latest break from 2012 until now is a huge problem because I'm in a battle with myself. I don't believe I'm going to be as good as I was before and I feel like I've lost it in that time. During that period, my confidence has just plummeted. Previously when I was knocked about my complexion, I had low self-esteem, now it's even worse. I'm literally trying to sort it out! That's why I get irritated when people say I should come back based off Grime's popularity. That was a part of me and that was my outlet, because my music is gone, I'm not me anymore. I'm not the same person and I'm trying so hard to be myself.

O: It has to be done when it feels right. I don't believe in entering something when you're not 100%. That's how you end up surrounded by great things happening to you except, you're not emotionally there for it and mental illnesses like depression take place.

L: Exactly! Before I would still do music but that was when it was a hobby

O: Your track 'Good for a Girl' states the obvious but what discrimination have you experienced in the scene, being a woman?

L: Pushing females together. The scene constantly tried to make it seem like a girl power thing but it wasn't, it's because they wanted everyone to believe females need to always be together to achieve something. No female can do anything by themselves was the opinion at the time. Now we can see that's not true because now, we have artists like Leshurr and Simz doing their own thing.

When I was coming up putting females together wasn't doing any one of us favours. Straight away people would assume "Ah you're a female, what have you got to say? You're dead, move on". Growing up I never cared for that, it just motivated me that you would hear you and me're going to change your opinion. Jammer had a show that was on YouTube and he curated a list of the "The top 10 butters female MCs in the scene". Why do we compare woman like this, they're not here for that. When you do things like that you disregard the person's feelings and it only creates problems, it's not positive for the scene. You won't see a list like that for the males in the scene.

O: I noticed on your site there is a quote stating that you can take on any male. How do you feel when your talent is ranked by how you can take on the opposite sex?

L: I always felt that I could be on par with other guys, but I was constantly placed into a bracket because of my gender. That's why the statement 'Good For a Girl' would get on my nerves. Why must our skills be compared over our genders, can't I just be good? There are girls that are dead and guys that are dead. Image was another thing too, there would be people in the position to help me get to the next level but didn't because my image wasn't "right" and they'd choose to push this person because they're "marketable" and they don't believe I am.

O: That's so cruel, I've never had that opinion of you and I'm saddened that it's not a surprise to hear this because that's the way of the industry unfortunately.

L: I wish that I had a stronger mind because none of that would have affected me and who knows what I would have come up with now.

O: I am a firm believer in everything happening for a reason. Sometimes it is better to withdraw from a situation to re-evaluate who you are exactly, especially when you are a black woman and society is telling you not to be.

L: True. Now if I came back and someone tells me I can't do something, they can watch me burst through that door.



O: Did you wish for more unity amongst the Grime scene? The status quo was for males and females to work separately and when they did come together, gender was often mentioned in the song

L: If you were going to have a 'POW remix' why couldn't there have been a girl on it. There were a lot of females who could've been brought on. Females do remixes instead, for 'Game Over' why did we have to do a version of our own?

O: How do you feel about the term 'femcee'?

L: [laughs] I used to be in a crew called 'femcee', me Queenie Wonda and Sly. At the time, we just thought it was cool, now it's like 'MC'. There was a time I realised I conformed.

O: Do you feel your accolades are celebrated enough and mentioned in today's Grime topics?

L: I think so, but I feel they shouldn't. I've only been doing music since I was 14 and I'm 26 now, that's over 10 years and I've only released 2 projects. I don't feel anybody should be saying anything about me.

O: I understand where you're coming from but you are mentioned for a reason and it's important to remember that there are a loads of legends that don't have a large catalogue of music.

L: Whilst I was doing music, there were a lot of people who could've cared but chose not to and now I'm not doing it anymore, they want to come and ask questions.

O: A.G said she experienced the same thing but in reverse. When she gained more of a buzz, people who could've helped in the past try and speak to her now about working.

L: Exactly! Move man!

O: Being a woman undergoing constant hormonal change, how has this affected you as an artist?

L: It changes my subject matters. When I was younger I was spitting about being the best and when I became older, I made a song about a guy 'Floating on Clouds', it was about this guy and we started seeing each other when we weren't meant to because he was my brother's friend. It was a mess! A sham! I had to tell everyone

O: I remember those ghetto love stories. We need them back!

L: Oi! It's Crazy, these things happen everyday and people are using music to tell me about Codeine. You're telling me I'm going to have a hard time and Codeine is going to help me.

O: Rent still has to be paid when it wears off [laughs]

O: Was your sexuality ever questioned?

L: Funnily enough, it wasn't. We did get booked for a lot of gay clubs but it was never something people questioned about me.

O: A question on a lot of people's lips: are you returning to the Grime scene, if so why?

L: I miss my outlet and I just want to tell everyone my stories because it may help someone else and that's what matters. I will be returning, I'm just not sure when and it has to be when the time is right.

O: Only when the time is right!

In 2002 ,Stush made her mark in the UK Garage and Grime scene with 'Dollar Sign'. She is someone I'd describe as strong and assertive. Throughout her music career she has stayed true to herself and is continuing to bless producers with her distinctive Dancehall sound.

Stush, the bright spark! We met in her area, Thornton Heath, where I was introduced to one of the best places to eat. The fruity cocktails they served blew me away but I learned a lot. She painted a vivid picture of what her music world was like from starting as a dancer at the Brits to becoming a signed artist as well as opening up to me about politics faced within the industry. We dipped in and out of patois during the interview, so don't mind us!





STUSH

STUSH, Thornton Heath

Ojerime: You featured on Sticky's 'Dollar Sign', how does it feel to know you've inspired a generation of females alongside Ms. Dynamite?

Stush: It feels good! Because I've had a long gap in releasing music sometimes I feel like the forgotten one. At times I don't feel like I've inspired so many people due to legal issues I faced with my record deal. If I have inspired people I'm happy.

O: I would say you have, I brought up your name to all the women in the zine and they know who you are! Your presence rubbed off on them to pursue music.

O: You mentioned in an interview [in 2008], that Sticky tricked you into treating Grime/UK Garage as sped-up dancehall tracks, looking back how do you feel about it today?

S: It worked, because people may not know is that I didn't have any musical influences from the UK, the majority of the sounds I listened to were from Jamaica. The only music played in my house, other than reggae was Whitney Houston, Stevie Wonder, music of that nature , on Thursday nights we'd watch Top of the Pops, that's where I got the balance of commercial music. Sticky needed to do that, I had to look at it like dancehall because that's all I knew.

O: It's a great psychology!

S: I thought it was great and because I don't have a problem with tempos or switching genres, I can find a flow in the beat. One of my influences for this was my older brother, he played a lot of Jungle in the house.

A lot of Dancehall artists were sampled on Jungle, so I could hear things at a faster pace already, what Sticky did was a great thing because ask anyone, I'm stubborn and once Stush has an idea in her head she's doing it that way init!

O: Your influences derived from Reggae, Dancehall and you recently mentioned R&B and commercial sounds. Was the Garage scene at the time what you had in mind?

S: I didn't and at the time I wanted to come out as a Dancehall artist I was told "Dancehall doesn't work in the UK, an English dancehall artist isn't going to work" and the worst thing you can ever tell me, is that I can't do something because I'll prove to you that it can be done. That's why Sticky had to tell me it's Dancehall sped-up, because he knew he wouldn't have got me on Garage. The only Garage tunes that I knew, were: 'Ms. Dynamite – Boo', 'Shanks & Bigfoot – Sweet Like Chocolate' and I was in the video for 'Craig David – Rewind' and 'Sweet Female Attitude – Flowers'.

O: I'm definitely going home to check for those cameos, I had no idea! Dynamite was also flowing in patois, so it's not surprise you were drawn to the sound.

S: Yeah! And that's why I liked it, because of the patois and that's what I was dancing to at dance class, so I knew the tune! Garage is something I never thought I'd have been doing; Dancehall and Hip Hop were my main two. I've been labelled as a purist but truthfully what I'd really like to do in music hasn't really been done.

“ **I WANTED TO A DANCEHALL ARTIST
I WAS TOLD AN ENGLISH DANCEHALL
ARTIST WOULDN'T WORK** ”

People see me as someone who will stick to Dancehall and not venture out when what I've released to this point is cross over music.

O: I don't believe you've had the chance to fully go at Dancehall

S: They haven't seen the beginning of me yet; I got stopped before I even got started. This might sound funny but in my head, I sound like Buju Banton, don't laugh or spit your coke out on me

O: [laughs]

S: Ask sticky! I had my Buju Banton and Bounty Killer voice on, in my head I thought my voice was deep.

O: I can see that all in your mannerisms with your hands that you're trying to make your voice deep [laughs].

S: It got broken to me a few years back "Stush.. you know that your voice isn't deep yeah?" I'm like "What do you mean? I'm like the female Bounty" I was quite devastated, I thought everyone was a liar [laughs]

O: I love the sharp high-pitched sound you make, as a vocalist, I know that's hard to do on demand. I know what you mean when you think you sound like someone, in my head I think I'm Beyonce...

S: I can't with you right now [laughs]

O: Being a Dancehall vocalist, could you relate to the garage scene at the time? Whilst the cultures may hold certain similarities, they are extremely different

S: If I'm honest, the garage scene was all new to me, I was drawn to 'Pay As You Go – Know We', 'Sticky ft. Tubby T – Tales Of Da Hood' because that side of Garage had certain elements that were more Dancehall, so those were the kind of songs that grabbed me. It was all new to me, that was my first experience of going to raves. I'd literally left the Brit school and ended up with a big tune so I was learning as I went along.

O: Mr. P pushed your talent for music over dance. That's what I'd call a proper teacher, when they nurture and push you to excel to that extent they really care!

S: Every year I go back to the Brits and I do their Reggae show on radio, so I produce the show for kids attending

O: Did you notice the transition from UK Garage to Grime and how did that affect you?

S: I've been having so many conversations about this! I spoke to Swiss about this a lot. When I was entering, I feel like it was already happening. Those tunes that I mentioned before, they weren't fully Garage. I call them "The Bridge", even So Solid weren't fully there



O: I agree, So Solid were in their own musical lane, that's why their music has aged so well. Their influences honed in from Hip Hop, UKG, Dancehall and they created a mash-up of an authentic British sound, which to me sounds like the beginning of our transition to Grime.

S: Exactly! For me, the first time I remember hearing something I couldn't describe and was totally different was 'Dizzee Rascal – I Luv U' I was like "Huh? This aint Garage... What is this?" I remember vividly thinking this is different. The whole Eski sound from Wiley was also different. So I feel like we were the bridge. That's why Wiley dropped 'Wot Do You Call It', with Wiley I can hear more yard influences, there's a different bounce to his sound. To me that was the beginning of Grime, then you had us, the ones who weren't too Garage but weren't Grime.

O: It's like a sub-strand of Garage, that lead to the becoming of Grime.

S: Even though people call 'Dollar Sign' a UKG track, I always thought it wasn't but didn't know what to call it.

O: How long would you say you were in the UKG/ Grime scene for?

S: I understand why you ask that because I'm so secluded from everyone. I've always been seen as the one who's over there by herself.

O: You contributed to the sound. But the scene is different; it's where the fans affiliate social groups I suppose. When you featured on Sway 'F Ur Ex', I didn't instantly put two and two together that it was you.

S: Thank you! So many people think this. Just before that track with Sway came out, I had a top 10 with Groove Amarda. I was on tours going around the world for three years. That tour taught me so much and it opened my eyes to so much. When you are part of one scene you don't see all that is going on around you.

O: There are so many artists that are out there making money, touring, selling music, have a social media presence and they're still not everywhere. It's crazy to know, someone can be a superstar in his or her own 'scene'. I feel today social media, to some, is a reflection of fan base. Artists like yourselves and Shystie have been around before the importance social media has today, so you feel your fan base when you walk outside or put on a headline show, the core fan base has already been cemented.

S: You didn't have Twitter, YouTube when I started. I didn't start using MySpace until 2007, 5 years after my first release.

Social media has never been me; I get cussed for it a lot. I came from an era where, if you want to know an artist, you buy into their album, single or vinyl release. Now it's flipped, the music has become less important and I tell you over social media who I am, so you don't need to buy my music anymore because I've told you everything! It's got the point where the consumer thinks "Why am I paying for this?". Everything is being devalued; all that time I spent putting my heart and soul into this project. Music is already being released so quickly.

O: I used to go into college with a new album every month, then there would be a dry spell for a while. Now I can't keep up

S: I used to be back and forth in between record stores and HMV, finding out the latest records; I was spending hundreds of pounds a week because I love music, so much.

O: Describe your during that time and how it represented you.

S: The first thing people think when they see me is that I'm a singer. They're surprised when they meet me.

O: I can see that still today. Dancehall culture isn't about casual clothes; it's about looking your best.

S: Right! The West Indian background I come from "Yuh put on yuh wicked suit, yuh Sunday garment, yuh Clarks" and you make an effort [laughs]. What I was taught is that; I'm a performer and an entertainer. If I'm not in that mode, I'll wear a tracksuit and if I am seen on stage wearing a tracksuit, know it's a fly one with stilettos!

O: Let them know!

S: My generation grew up looking at the likes of Tina Turner, when you look at them, that's what sets apart a star!

O: That's evident in So Solid's styling choices they treated their videos like an event. Even when they wore tracksuits, they were never average. I wanted to be like Lisa Maffia watching her on TV

S: Because Lisa dresses boom! We had Mis-steeq. There may be certain things we do that are seen as an old school mentality but you had legends. Prince! You'd never see him on stage in a tracksuit and trainers

O: Never, you know he arrives to rehearsals dressed up

O: What was it like being signed and when did this happen?

S: I got signed August 2002. People assume it's fun being signed, but it's one of the hardest things. If things are going well, that means you have to maintain and I've seen a trend where artists get signed and their creativity just goes. There's a lot of pressure involved, people will tell you to change musically when you don't want to necessarily go down their route. I got signed, my album didn't get produced, and I went through a lot of hell and only just got released out of my contract two years ago. For over ten years of my life, I was shelved because of a situation that had nothing to do with me. After a few years I still wasn't ready to move on because I was so effected by it; my confidence was low, I ended up dwelling in self-pity and I was never a victim, I was always sure of myself and confident. It left me questioning whether my talent was even good enough. I was always certain I was put on this Earth to be a performer. I had to go to speech therapy, it turns out that I was so broken that I couldn't verbally express myself. Music was my expression, it was a hard time. On top of that I was paranoid about what everyone thought of me, whether I was a one-hit wonder or a flop. I'm a survivor, so I went back to 9-5 work and thought, "frig what anyone else has to say", there are bills and I will not sit there and starve. I kept saying to myself that I know why I'm here and I'm only spending a year in this job, even if things are not going that great. I left that job not knowing what was going to happen next but I knew I had recorded a track with Groove Armada and I was waiting for it to come out.

“

**I HAD A TOP 10 WITH GROOVE ARMADA.
I WAS ON TOURS GOING AROUND THE
WORLD FOR THREE YEARS**

”

I remember going into work to let them know I had to leave the job because I'm going on tour; I'll be in Australia, New Zealand ect. I invited all my colleagues down to my shows. I knew a lot of people were looking down at me, so I was happy for the turnaround.

O: You stated that you wanted to quit music in 2008, with all the issues you had with your label, has being a woman in the industry affected you in any way?

S: I get asked this question a lot, I feel I had the respect from my male counterparts. I get told "You came out at a time when you had to be good" and it wasn't cool to become a musician. So I had a certain level of respect, so I didn't have those problems. Having said that, I had the issue with my label in 2002, released a track in 2008 so I felt every time I tried to move, something was stopping me but I try to deflect that kind of thinking. Everything got on top of me and there are times you fall out of love with music. Music is a relationship. I needed a break, I flew to Dominica, to my mum's place in the hills .

O: it's vital to understand yourself. There is a world outside of London; there is a mentality that everything we need is here. Should anyone be fortunate to have enough money for travel, I advise doing as much of that as possible, not everyone has that luxury.

O: Was your appearance ever a focus over your music?

S: At the beginning, there was never an issue but I never had a music video. I was an artist who sold music without visuals.

O: Which is understandable, when you first came out videos were expensive. Videos required treatments and production companies.

S: Everything went pear-shaped by then. I remember a magazine interview where they told me that my skin was too dark to put the writing over my face I remember thinking, "Well use a different colour".

O: Are they using brown front?

S: I'm so happy to have the parents I have because there's nothing you could ever say to me that'll make me pick up skin bleaching products. My skin is the booming! I've always wanted to represent being a dark skin female doing music. Colourism is still an issue that is coming up and I don't like it.

O: You have another business venture 'Stushlery', could you explain how this came about?

S: It's my jewellery line, it came about when I took a break from music and need something therapeutic to take part in. Making jewellery is something I've wanted to explore, so I joined a class in Croydon. I made certain pieces and my teacher thought they were really good and that I should try selling them. I made pieces weeks in advance of mother's day and sold £100 worth, I received funding from the Prince's trust and the rest is history!

O: What are your thoughts on today's scene?

S: I'm not 100% up on it but I know about Stormzy and Nadia I like them both. I've heard things in passing but because there's so much music out now. I know the ones from Thornton Heath; Krept & Konan, Section Boyz ect but that's because I'm from there so I'm more inclined to listen.

O: Do you feel you can still vocal UKG/Grime?

S: I've always jumped on what I'm feeling, so it's just a case of me writing to the beat. A lot of the EDM I've vocalled hasn't touched the UK, it's placed in other countries so people assume I haven't been making music, so if I came back to Grime my fear is that people will assume I'm coming back for the hype rather than the love.

O: That shouldn't be a fear of yours, there is always going to be judgement either way. If you like something and are genuine, that radiates. I understand when you're signed, to certain labels, they may not push the Grime tracks you were ready to release.

S: I performed in Brixton the other night, I performed 'Dollar Sign' and 'We Nuh Run From Dem', then I performed an unreleased track and the whole place went mad! That was just a pure Grime track. I looked back at the footage to see a man going absolutely mad [laughs] I'm not sure what he was doing to his face

O: I think they're ready for you. Anyone who speaks loosely on you pursuing Grime today hasn't done his or her research is all.

O: Do you feel your accolades are celebrated enough?

S: I do feel I'm forgotten a lot of the time.

O: I sense that, I mentioned this before. There's an issue when lists on blogs are created on the topic of female UKG and Grime scene and your name isn't there. It shows research hasn't been done. Lioness, Shystie, A.G know your power as you were one the originals.

S: I agree. The Groove Armada track was from a different scene and I felt music is music. Groove Armada were huge and opened a lot of doors for me but because of my presence, they were played on 1Xtra and that was the first time. Their age range for shows were mid 30s upwards, then 'Get Down' came out and we had 15 year olds attending, it opened doors both ways. The problem is only a certain world knows about that but if I go to Australia, LA and mention the track it's recognised. That's why I rate Jamz Supernova, she's been supporting the new stuff I've been doing and it feels like she's the only one in the world who actually knows what I'm doing. Cerasee, my close friend does an event 'Rum + Bass' and is always supporting me playing my tracks in Miami. I was told in New York that I'm huge in EDM right now but because I don't have a music video of my own people don't attach a face to it and that's always been the case for me. My voice is more known.

O: Given the diverse amount of talent in the scene at the moment, do you feel there's anyone in the UK that has managed to use your sound to influence their music today?

S: I feel because I wasn't about a lot, people's influences lay with other women in the scene. Whilst some use patois or yard slang it's not thoughtout the whole track. There was an incident in 2010 where an artist released a song and I got phone calls saying an artist has stolen my style. I brushed it off like "Yuh cyan teef the style but yuh nuh guh do it right" [laughs]

O: [laughs] They can try but will not succeed

S: [laughs] I spoke to Lioness about it and in the scene, it caused a lot of uproar. I didn't have Twitter at the time and listeners were going at her. I wasn't happy because my whole sound was ripped, and my high pitch which I'm known for was also mimicked. It's more than fine to be influenced as an artist but be yourself

O: *What are your upcoming music plans?*

S: I've just released a track through Spinnin Records with Wiwek and Greg Salto. I'm currently working on an EP, hopefully for Summer and I have plans for my new label, I have quite a few plans in the pipeline.





Gun fingers

Often misinterpreted as a sign of aggression or violence, but actually used to support where words fail.

example: when a track holds so much fire it needs a wheel by the DJ. This counts for live performances, DJ sets and everyday conversations.



The 'P' sign

One of the most famous 'rep your endz' hand signs, this represented a darker time in London.

"Postcode wars".
A territorial period of time for youths that overtime 'blew over'[2016]. During this time, you couldn't been seen by a rival gang in their area, you could be approached even if minding your own business, which was related to a lot of the gun and knife crime between 2004-2010 where unfortunately a lot of young lives were taken. There are way more politics involved that I won't pretend to understand as a female.

The 'P' was used by Peckham residents and was also known as 'narm' 'Peckneerz' (Nunhead boys said this to me a lot growing up) or 'pecky' to some. Being one of the most recognized symbols, other areas began to create their own. Areas were also colour coded and this depended on the colour of their public bins or boroughs colour branding. Example: Lewisham = blue borough.

Whilst the Peckham sign could be used for territorial reasons. It could also be used lightly and found deeply entrenched in the 2007 archives of school photos of young girls posing before school registration or break time [bebo/piczo]. Often taken on a Sony Ericsson Walkman phone. It is likely 70% of the 10 girls in the image weren't from the Narm but were using it to create 'banter'.

If you were careful enough you could be labelled a 'Peckham beg'.

[bebo comments]

"Oh that's A***n, he begs Peckham don't mind him"

"I swear you're from Pecky? Oh you're not? So why are you putting up the P sign in your Facebook profile?"

"Oh swear you're from Peckham? Whereabouts? Ah I dunno sounds a bit Dulwichy to me".

The peace sign

To explain this, I must explain how we, the Millennial evolved the selfie we all know and love today.

Before we had the luxury of front-facing cameras. There was the struggle, they never talk about. The same 'they' Khaled warned us about... but I digress.

When we were first blessed with camera phones, the original selfie of 2005 involved a stretch, a 90° palm facing hand angle whilst pressing the capture button (that wasn't always placed conveniently on the side of the phone), then further holding the phone mid-air for 2 secs whilst adjusting your peace sign and hair ribbons mentally because you couldn't really move by this point, then allowing anti-shake time of 2 seconds after capturing the image (The cooling off period). All the above being done whilst not exactly knowing how your face looked, it could've been too close, too far or may have not even captured the image because your storage only allowed 20 images and you used them all on own clothes day. The 'Blind selfie'.

Fast forward to the birth of Instagram in 2012.. by 2013, the peace sign came back with attitude, seen in the illustration below. Oh it was everywhere. Back and better. That's not to say the peace sign wasn't in use. It just wasn't cool during my school years. The origins of the selfie peace sign can be found buried deep in the archives of many of our bebo pages filed under 'TrEw WuNz...x'.



The middle finger.

"Fuck You".