

FEMME

photographed by beth garrabrant

london-based
electro-pop
musician laura
bettinson is a
writing, recording,
producing machine.
by holly rubenstein

BOT

Rain lashes against the windows of a tiny café in London's Soho neighborhood. Patrons wrapped in woolen scarves sip on espressos and tap away on laptops. It's a particularly dreary evening in a city famous for copious precipitation, but when Laura Bettinson, a.k.a. Femme, blows in off the street, it's as if the clouds have parted. With a pale pink bowl cut, enormous gold hoops, and glitter-tipped nails, she's a rainbow.

Bettinson orders a flat white and stirs it while explaining the origins of her artistic persona. "No one's going to ask 'Femme' to pass the potatoes at dinner—she's the creative side of what I do," she says. "A lot of my favorite artists' careers have survived decades

because they brought out different characters at different points, like Bowie or Madonna."

For Femme, Bettinson wanted to combine masculine hip-hop beats with catchy, feminine hooks and harmonies that embodied the spirit, charm, and sass of '60s girl groups. Bored by the current crop of what she calls "bland hit-factory pop tunes," she began penning tracks that paid homage to that earlier era, while hanging on to a 21st-century bass line.

A Goldsmiths grad like Katy B and James Blake, the 25-year-old takes DIY to the extreme when it comes to her own music. So far,

she's written, recorded, and produced a string of bliss-stomp electro-pop singles, and shot and edited a series of saturated, luxe-punk videos. The end result is reminiscent of early 2000s electroclash, her "Fever Boy" a sweet—and PG-13—update to Peaches's "Fuck the Pain Away."

Even though Bettinson handles every step of the music-making process herself, she casts her creative group of friends to act in her stylish videos. "You know how when you were a kid, you'd get your girlfriends together and make up dances and perform them for anyone?" she asks. "That's essentially what we do every

weekend." Which isn't to say her art is not being taken seriously—especially by the fashion crowd. Without even an EP under her belt, she's soundtracked two Stella McCartney collections as well as an adidas campaign. When it comes to Femme's signature style, Bettinson says she finds most of her source material while combing Tumblr for images tagged "retro future," and that typically she follows the "more is more" theory. "All of those tinfoil outfits and colander hats that are very space-age in an amazing '60s way—I get a lot of mileage out of that," she says.

Femme is not Bettinson's first foray into mid-century style, however. If her "Beauty School Dropout"-esque 'do looks familiar, there's good reason. Half a decade ago, she fronted the experimental rock band Ultraïsta alongside famed producers Nigel Godrich and Joey Waronker of Atoms for Peace. But these days, all of her artistic energy is devoted to developing Femme—and steering clear of the status quo. "I'd rather play to 20 people for the rest of my life, believing in what I'm doing and having fun than be up there singing someone else's song, wearing some god-awful clothes that I didn't choose," she says. "That's my worst nightmare." Bettinson continues, asserting that anyone can do what she does: "The dance routines, the vintage outfits—ultimately, it's all about capturing a sense of sisterhood."

femme shows us
how to copy her edie
sedgwick-inspired
makeup on nylontv

hair and makeup: michelle coursey.