

JESSIE WEARS BLAZER, Haider Ackermann, from Net-a-porter. TROUSERS, Leon Max, from Fenwick. GOLD EARRINGS, Monica Vinader
OPPOSITE PAGE: BLAZER, Lanvin, from Net-a-porter. TOP, Wolford. TROUSERS, Stella McCartney, from Net-a-porter. SHOES, Aeyde



WARE

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Thanks to her friend Ed Sheeran's advice, singer JESSIE WARE's latest album is her most confessional yet. She tells *Elaine Lipworth* why it is time to get personal ►

PHOTOGRAPHS BILLIE SCHEEPERS



A few days before my interview with Jessie Ware, I watch the South London pop sensation perform at the Troubadour, West Hollywood's legendary venue. The concert is sold out – there are queues stretching along Santa Monica Boulevard – and inside, the club is packed.

Often compared to Sade, Jessie, 33, looks every inch the superstar in a vintage Chanel ensemble and a chic leather beret. She belts out older hits such as 'Wildest Moments' and new ones, including the catchy 'Your Domino' from her latest (third) album *Glasshouse*. The atmosphere is upbeat and intimate; kicking off her stilettos, Jessie clammers on to the speakers in front of the stage, reaching out to hold hands and grab phones for selfies.

Before I go any further, a disclaimer: I am a family friend, having grown up in Manchester with Jessie's mum Lennie (real name Helena) Ware, a social worker, and Sarah-Jane Cohen, her TV-producer cousin. I've known Jessie since she was a baby and it is always thrilling to watch her perform. After the concert, I join her for drinks. Jessie is surrounded by admirers, and I note that on stage she has an unusual rapport with her fans. 'They're pretty die-hard,' she smiles. 'I like to think they could stop me on the street and we could have a chat.'

Later in the week, it is a more relaxed Jessie who I meet on a sunny Los Angeles morning, lifting her 16-month-old baby out of her pushchair, while chatting to her husband of three years Sam Burrows (they met at primary school in Clapham and have been together more or less since they were 17). We are in the front garden of the house where the family is staying, which belongs to super-producer Benny Blanco who co-produced *Glasshouse* and has written songs for Rihanna, Selena Gomez and Justin Bieber.

Currently on baby duty while his wife is working, Sam is a personal trainer when at home in Dalston, East London. I ask him if he trains Jessie. 'I try not to,' he laughs. 'She is very stubborn and I demand an element of respect

from my clients that I'm not going to get from Jessie.' With that, he scoops up his daughter, taking her on an errand so Jessie and I can talk.

We decide to stay outside in the garden. Unlike LA celebs who invariably sit in the shade, Jessie is 'a sun worshipper. I'm wearing a swimming costume under my shirt because I'm hoping that I can get a tan, I need some vitamin D.'

Jessie reminds me of her mother – unguarded, funny and self-deprecating. Juggling concerts and sleepless nights with the baby has been 'exhausting', she admits. She says her London life is so 'normal' she doesn't 'feel like a pop star' but does admit 'my mum and brother always text me when they hear my music playing in Matalan. I need to own my success and stop being a bumbling, apologetic Brit,' she laughs. 'The



“ED SHEERAN PUSHED ME: HE LOOKED AT ONE OF MY HALF-FINISHED SONGS AND TOLD ME TO BE MORE EXPLICIT”

leather beret I wore at the LA concert helped me,' she adds. 'I felt like Janet Jackson!'

In fact, Jessie's entire family is successful. Her father John Ware is a former *Panorama* journalist; her sister Hannah, 35, is a talented actress, who is currently starring opposite Sean Penn in TV space drama *The First* which will be seen on Channel 4 later this year. Her brother Alex, 30, is a doctor – though he is taking a year's sabbatical from medicine to go on tour and help out Jessie and Sam with childcare. Lennie is Jessie's biggest inspiration. 'Nothing is too much for her.' Among her mother's many talents: 'Laundry. I still give

her some of my dirty clothes because she can remove any stain – it's her party trick.'

Raised in Clapham, Jessie was nine when her parents divorced. 'I was aware that they were going to break up when I was young; they didn't get on well, to be honest. It was a shame but I had a pretty happy childhood. What do they say? We like to put the "fun" in "dysfunctional".' Lennie, says Jessie, was an 'incredible' single parent. 'I don't know how she did it with three of us. She always did a brilliant cooked dinner and she worked full time.' I'd heard Lennie recently cooked for Jessie's pal, the Israeli-British chef Yotam Ottolenghi and his partner Karl Allen. 'She hated me for arranging that,' laughs Jessie, 'because she was, like, "great, you've invited him round and we can't cook an Ottolenghi recipe."' Instead, 'she made Persian rice, tahdig and puy lentils. I made Nigel Slater's roast peaches and mascarpone.'

On the subject of her family, I ask Jessie about 'Sam', the most personal song on her new album, which she co-wrote with Ed Sheeran, a close friend. It marks a new confessional direction for her. In the chorus, Jessie sings, 'I hope I'm as brave as my mother,' referring to the way Lennie raised the family single-handedly. It goes on, 'I hope she knows that I found a man far from my father...' Jessie says she never intended the line as an 'attack' on her father. 'It celebrates my mum and husband and explains a little bit about my past in a way I've never done before. That line speaks a thousand words and it seems to be the line people are singing.'

Writing the forthright lyrics wasn't easy. 'It took Ed to push me,' says Jessie. Before having her baby, Jessie was providing backing vocals on Ed's album *Divide*: 'I asked him to look at the half-finished song and he encouraged me to be more explicit.' Once the record came out, 'I felt guilty,' she says. 'I was like, "Aagh, my poor dad."' Her father's reaction to the song? 'He texted me to say, "I'm really hurt", and I said, "It's not meant to crucify you, it's just that you and Mum didn't work out. I've got a guy who hasn't had an affair.' But he's not a terrible person. There were four years when I didn't talk to him but, since the baby came along, we're in the best place ►

Above: Jessie on stage last year at the Troubadour in West Hollywood. Opposite: SHIRT, Jacquemus, from Fenwick. EARRINGS, Monica Vinader



From left: Jessie with celebrity friends Paloma Faith and Sam Smith; with husband Sam and mum Lennie, promoting their *Table Manners* podcast

◀ we've been for a long time. He loves it when I send pictures of her.'

Is she concerned about writing confessional lyrics in future? 'I don't know...maybe I'll lose a few more friends and family members!' she jokes.

Her repaired relationship with her father must be a relief to Jessie, who is very close to her family. As children, says Jessie, all three siblings 'fought like cat and dog. I've got a fake tooth from when my sister knocked it out - she banged my head in the bathroom. I dislocated my brother's arm once.' Now, though, 'we're really tight and there isn't competition. The only rivalry,' laughs Jessie, 'is to do with who gets to spend more time with Mum.'

Jessie credits her 'amazing' music teacher Mr MacMillan at primary school for encouraging her. 'He spotted my talent.' After starring in a space-themed musical written by the inspiring teacher, he suggested recording one of the songs 'Way Up Here'. Jessie's first self-released single was a big hit locally. 'All the sweet parents, including Sam's, obligingly bought copies, bless them.'

But she never anticipated a career in music. 'I was socially confident, but not confident in my voice. I didn't think that I could be a pop star.' After reading English at Sussex University, Jessie landed a job as trainee journalist at *The Jewish Chronicle*. (Lennie is Jewish and raised her children in the religion.) 'We had mini bagels every Friday. It was lovely,' says Jessie, who intends to bring up her daughter Jewish. 'I would like her to have a bat mitzvah because I didn't have one and the religion is culturally important to me.'

Jessie's next job was as an assistant to the creative director at Love Productions, the TV company behind *The Great British Bake Off*. Her big musical break came when her friend, the singer Jack Peñate, asked her to go on tour with him as a backing singer. Attracting critical attention for her unusually powerful voice, she landed a recording contract. Jessie's 2012 debut album *Devotion* went gold and she received two

Brit Award nominations and a Mercury Prize nomination. Her follow-up album *Tough Love* reached the top ten in 2014. She then co-wrote the song 'Meet Me in the Middle' for the soundtrack of the film *Fifty Shades of Grey*.

But it is *Glasshouse*, she says, which is her biggest accomplishment so far. 'I'm proud of "Thinking About You" which is about my daughter. When she's older and she thinks I'm really uncool, I'll be, like, "I wrote a song for you," and she'll be, like, "Whatever, I don't care." She says 'Sam' is 'the defining song' on the record, although her husband is 'quite embarrassed' about the title 'because he's the most un-starry person. But he's incredibly proud of me. I am lucky that I have somebody who is supportive of me. He realises this is my time to work hard and then I'll support him with his career. He wants to be a PE teacher.'

It's interesting that Jessie writes about heartbreak, even though she and Sam have such a stable relationship. 'Sam's been my only serious boyfriend, but we have broken up twice,' she says. 'I kissed frogs, and boys have messed me about. And I've had heartbreak in different senses,' she says, 'my dad leaving, people close to me dying.'

In August 2014, Jessie and Sam married on the Greek island of Skopelos (where the hit movie *Mamma Mia!* was filmed). Her new album explores how their marriage has changed 'like any relationship does once you have children - you have to ride the storm. I managed to document that yearning, to get back to how we were before with songs like "First Time", about the need to remind ourselves why we're together.'

Given her rapport with her mother, it doesn't surprise me that in Jessie's latest venture she has teamed up with Lennie to record a podcast series called *Table Manners* - intimate chats with her famous friends over meals cooked by Lennie.

'Mum is such a magnetic person; when you meet her you fall for her. The collaboration is great - I get a meal from my mum every week and we get

to chat.' There is natural banter between mother and daughter. 'She berates me for not cooking the right way and she doesn't realise how funny she is.' Sam Smith was their first dinner guest. Other episodes include chats with actors Joe Dempsie and Daniel Kaluuya, and presenter/DJ Annie Mac.

There will be no shortage of guests. Jessie's friends include some of Britain's most gifted female musicians. 'I sang at Ellie Goulding's Christmas charity gig for Shelter. Paloma Faith and I were in touch throughout our pregnancies, and Flo is lovely,' she says of Florence Welch, a friend from Alleyn's School in Dulwich, which they both attended. 'I haven't seen Adele recently, but I saw her when I was pregnant,' says Jessie. 'People like to pit us all against each other but there's a real camaraderie between us.'

There is talk of a *Table Manners* TV show. I wonder whether Jessie envisages her family turning into a UK Kardashian phenomenon? 'I don't know about that...we're pretty private. But I love *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*. If there is a show, Sarah can produce it,' she smiles, referring to her cousin and my friend.

At this point, Sam returns with the baby, who takes tentative steps around the garden, to her mum's delight. Would Jessie like more children? 'Definitely, madly!' Motherhood has altered Jessie's perspective on her career. 'It has made me more focused. I need to provide for my daughter and I also want to inspire her and instil a good work ethic so she can see that you can do anything in life - but you have to work hard. What drives me - and I know it sounds clichéd - is to make my family proud,' says Jessie. 'If music doesn't work out, I'll do something else.' Does she have a plan B? 'Maybe I'd be a teacher,' says Jessie, as her husband swiftly interjects: 'There's no need for a plan B because it has already worked out.' ❖

■ *Glasshouse is out now on PMR Island Records; Table Manners is available to download on iTunes. Jessie will embark on a UK and European tour in March*

STYLING: ANGIE SMITH, HAIR: ADAM GARLAND AT EIGHTEEN MANAGEMENT USING DYSON HAIR TOOLS AND HAIR BY SAM MCKNIGHT, MAKE-UP: REBECCA WORDINGHAM AT SAINT LUKE USING BOBBI BROWN, PRODUCER: ESTER MALLOY, GETTY IMAGES, RICHARD YOUNG/REX, SHUTTERSTOCK, NICK HARVEY, OLLIE GROVE

JUST FOR JESSIE

DESCRIBE YOURSELF IN THREE WORDS

Loyal, neurotic, determined.

YOUR BIGGEST INSPIRATIONS

Sade and Annie Lennox: they're mothers, great songwriters and British.

ON YOUR BEDSIDE TABLE

Five pairs of reading glasses because my eyesight is getting worse, a teacup I should have taken downstairs, vapour rub for the baby and a couple of books.

WHAT WOULD SURPRISE PEOPLE ABOUT YOU?

I set the fire alarm off at least three times a week because I'm an impatient cook.

WHO MAKES YOU LAUGH?

My daughter, because she reminds me of myself in how determined and stubborn she is.

MOTTO

Everyone keeps saying to me, 'Don't be so hard on yourself,' so that's becoming my motto.

PERFECT DAY

The baby sleeps past 5.30am, we bring her into our bed and put on some jazz: Billie Holiday or Ella Fitzgerald. We go to Victoria Park or mooch at a farmer's market, then come home and watch a film. Basically, I'm a homebody and the more I get to be with my husband and baby, the better.

BLAZER, Karen Millen.

TROUSERS, Stella McCartney, from Net-a-Porter.

GOLD EARRINGS, Monica Vinader

