

✕ A STAR IS BØRNS

AS A TEN-YEAR-OLD working magician in the lakeside resort town of Grand Haven, Michigan, Garrett Borns went by the name of Garrett the Great. He performed at countless birthday parties, staged a weekly show at a local red-sauce joint, and even starred in his own instructional magic video, for which he also built the sets and composed the music. Now, at 24, as he powers through an ever-expanding world tour in support of his retrofuturistic debut album, *Dopamine*, the glam-pop prince known professionally as BØRNS is drawing on lessons that he learned from his sleight-of-hand days. “How to improvise when you fuck up,” he explains. “Pretending like you still know what’s going on and then trying to recover from it. It kind of thickens your skin. That’s pretty much been the past year and a half of my life.”

Ever since Taylor Swift endorsed his first single, “Electric Love,” calling it an “instant classic” on Instagram, Borns has often had the out-of-body experience of hearing his own falsetto wherever he goes. “Even if you can’t hear the lyrics,” he says over lunch in Los Angeles, his adopted hometown, “you’re hearing its melody under an ad for Hulu or Southwest Airlines. It’s, like, subliminally happening around you.” It’s the one that kicks into gear Marc Bolan-style, with a *chunka chunka* drumbeat and skuzzy guitar licks, and then segues into an a cappella finger-snapping bridge by way of Haim before revving back up into its soaring chorus (“*And all I need is to be struck by your Eee-lec-tric LUH-000-UH-000-UHVE*”). But like Borns himself—who’s looking very *Hunky Dory*-era David Bowie in a green crop top and high-waisted blue jeans that accentuate his rail-thin frame, his long and wavy locks glinting in the sun—there is just something undeniable about “Electric Love” that transcends pastiche. “The structures are a lot more simplified now, especially in pop music,” he says. “The Bee Gees, for example, wrote songs

that sound so simple and palatable to your ear, but when you actually break them down, they’re so heady and complex. I’m trying to write songs with vivid colors and techniques that trick your mind. It’s more fun that way.”

Borns may have an old soul, but he often comes across as a mischievous innocent. At one point, he interrupts himself mid-sentence—“God, the amount of butt cheeks hanging out in Santa Monica is just...”—and then strikes up an imaginary conversation with our waitress. “I’ll have the side of butt cheeks, please. Yes, with the coconut oil. I can do the lathering.”

Borns arrived in L. A. at 21 and lived in an actual treehouse, which was surrounded by fruit trees and nestled in a remote canyon, while tooling around town in a ’78 Mercedes 300D and indulging in 20-something pleasures such as “picking up produce at the farmers’ market, cooking for myself, going to yoga, exercising a lot, and just clearing my mind.” Now he embodies what the fashion rags are calling “the new Gucci man,” as conceived by creative director Alessandro Michele. Borns was invited to Gucci’s January runway show in Milan, where he sat in the front row, and at Coachella in April, he rocked a louche-and-lacy ensemble. “I’m living the dream, man,” he says—but there’s a twinkle in his eye that makes you question what he really means by that. The dream, Borns clarifies, “is pushing yourself further than you think you can go. It’s feeling like the payoff is equal to the amount of work that you’re putting in.”

Though he just got back to L. A., Borns has no time to chill. He’s off to Chicago tomorrow, followed by Europe for more festivals, and then he heads back to the States for a tour with the Lumineers. After which, he says, “it’s back to the drawing board.” Temperamentally driven to take his audience by surprise, Borns—like Bowie—is destined to metamorphose. Indeed, it’s happening before my very eyes. Flashing fingernails dotted with last night’s polish, he lifts a glass to his lips and sips a bright red elixir. “It’s the Roots and Remedy,” he says. “Anything with beets. I’m a beet aficionado. Ever read *Jitterbug Perfume*? The Tom Robbins novel? The whole book is about finding immortality. They’re searching for the secret ingredient. They worship the beet.” Near the end of our lunch, I ask Borns if it bothers him that his name is always mentioned in the same breath as Taylor Swift’s. His eyes narrow. “She’s the biggest pop star in the world,” he says. “Why wouldn’t you want to be associated with that? It’s like saying, ‘*You gotta try this juice, man. It’s the best juice ever!*’ Doesn’t make the juice taste any different, you know?”

—LAURENCE LOWE



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