

THE MONTH IN ART, PHOTOGRAPHY, BOOKS AND MUSIC

inVOGUE

BY SHAHNAZ SIGANPORIA

SPOTLIGHT

Superwoman returns

Part real-talking wing woman and part cyber sage, YouTube's highest-paid female artist and millennial star, LILLY SINGH, tells AARTI VIRANI how she built her empire and reigns over it like a 'Bawse Lady'!

Photographed by KREERATH SUNITTRAMAT | Styled by DAVIAN LAIN

www.vogue.in | VOGUE INDIA JULY 2017 99

HAIR: PATRICK MELVILLE/TRACEY MATTINGLY USING GOLDWELL PROFESSIONAL MAKE-UP: REBECCA RESTREPO/TRACY MATTINGLY USING ELIZABETH ARDEN MICHELLE MATHEWS USING MAC COSMETICS SPECIAL THANKS: DUNE STUDIOS

To say Lilly Singh, better known by her digital moniker Superwoman, is sleep-deprived would be an epic understatement. On a recent phone call from a hotel room in Manchester, England, one of the 34 stops on an international odyssey to promote her first book (which released this March)—the *New York Times* bestseller *How To Be A Bawse: A Guide To Conquering Life* (Ballantine Books)—the magnetic 28-year-old confesses to setting an hourly alarm running through the previous night. It was an earnest attempt to ensure some precious video footage (the lifeblood to her YouTube channel and its over 11 million subscribers) was smoothly transferred to her Los Angeles-based team in spite of a rather fickle internet connection. Even Superwoman, it seems, can't escape the perils of patchy wi-fi.

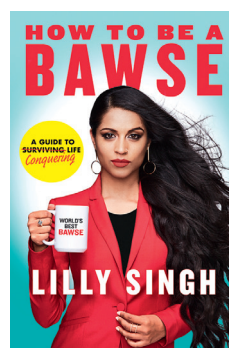
"It's so ridiculous, I know," she says of her draining all-nighter. "I've just always had the need to do things super extra, above and beyond. And I don't know if it's a strength or a weakness." Coming from anyone else, that statement might reek of pretention. But from Singh, whose formidable digital dominion—1.5 billion views and counting—comprises a series of authentic confessionals and bi-weekly videos that animatedly tackle everything from gender stereotypes and racism, to poop and periods, it's just another endearing admission that makes her the quintessential Everygirl.

THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

Even though the plucky Indo-Canadian's stratospheric ascent from bhangra team captain to internet royalty mirrors the revolutionary success of YouTube itself, she didn't exactly set out to become the millennial-in-chief. Singh discovered the fledgling web platform during her last year at Toronto's York University, in 2010, where she was wrapping up a psychology degree and grudgingly considering graduate school. "I was convinced I had to live this very linear life and was going through a really rough time," she recalls. Intrigued by the sheer simplicity of online video—"literally, just being human on camera"—Singh drew on her Sikh upbringing for one of her initial contributions, a rough-around-the-edges turban-tying tutorial, which she then followed up with other herit-

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—LILLY SINGH



age-influenced gems such as 'Sh*t Punjabi Mothers Say', before delivering more universally appealing sketches, like 'How Girls Get Ready'.

"In essence, the videos were just me trying to make myself happy," Singh says. "I guess they made other people happy, too." A rapidly expanding fan base led to star-studded collaborations (Michelle Obama, Seth Rogen, James Franco, Dwayne Johnson and Priyanka Chopra, to name a few), a world tour, a behind-the-scenes documentary that chronicled the said world tour, a People's Choice Award, and the launch of #GirlLove, Singh's ambitious campaign to wipe out cyber bullying and girl-on-girl hate, proceeds of which were donated to primary schooling for girls in Kenya and the Malala Fund.

BAWSE LADY

Her latest endeavour, or "the bawse book," as she dubs it, is a collection of 50 bold mission statements ("Get Uncomfortable", "Eff Protocol", "No Piggybacks") spiked with Superwoman sass, the power of believing in unicorn island and life advice she's culled from tête-à-têtes with artists like MIA and Selena Gomez. "I had a very romanticised idea about how writing would go," she admits. "I thought I was going to be fabulous, take four months off, and hang out by a fireplace." The cosy sabbatical never came, and drafts were often punched out at the end of days with overflowing to-do lists. But that's not code for sloppiness. "I've revisited chapters so many times, I truly have the book memorised," she says. "In fact, the other day I told my friend to read me any sentence and I could identify the chapter," she adds, referring to rapper and fellow YouTuber Humble The Poet. "I was six for six."

Singh doesn't mind that her nerdy side is on display. As a self-described analytics freak, she's charted the stats on her YouTube channel to recently discover that her audience, aka Team Super, is growing up with her. "People have gone from saying, 'Hey, I hide in class and watch your videos,' to 'My husband and I watch you every day,'" she explains. "They're evolving with me," she continues. "And right now, I'm just really about dope content that evokes emotion." ■