

SOME GIRL



Putting this magazine together is no picnic. Hell, no. The team slaves over every word, suffers over every picture. There are days when Dante would be daunted by the sights and sounds in the **etc.** lounge, and days when we ask ourselves what we're really doing here...

But there are good days too. Like, say, when Rachel Stevens calls. Now, we're not over-awed by celebrity, but we know when respect is due, and let's face it, she is pretty close to royalty. So when someone said 'It's Rachel Stevens for you,' we moved a little faster than usual to pick up the phone. We weren't going to let her go without a proper chat...

WORDS: EV

GOING SOLO

Rachel's very public success story is well known. A member of S-Club 7 (12 top 10 hits, four number ones, 13m records sold), Rachel kept going when the group stopped. Whether she's storming up the UK charts, fronting football themes on Sky or making *FHM*-readers go all squiffy, she always seems to come up trumps. But success doesn't come without a load of hard work.

'Oh, there's lots of stuff going on,' Rachel begins (in a particularly lovely voice, guys) when we ask what she's been

Ho ho, chuckles **etc.** We didn't think we'd manage to scare and excite a real life diva. Turns out we don't: 'Now I'm so much more in control of everything, and have more input creatively and in every other way – so yeah, it's very cool,' she continues, before we can enjoy our new feelings of power. Curses.

So is this solo confidence down to careful grooming by her People (someone like Rachel always has 'People', we imagine)? 'Oh God no,' she says. 'I got no tips, it was just straight in at the deep end. I don't know, I always feel like I've

mean? It was just a real mixture. And Bon Jovi's album *Slippery When Wet* – that's an amazing album [yes! **etc.** grew up with that too!]. But it kind of changed over the years – I've got a real mix of different types of music in my collection.'

She brings us up to date: 'I love *pop* music, so I knew I wanted to do pop music. When I first heard "LA-X" [her first hit single], it grabbed me instantly. It was something that was very different – in its production it was a bit edgier. I think it still appealed to the young audience I had with S-Club: I met loads of kids who said



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up to. She's taken a break from the studio where she's working on her new album, the follow-up to *Funky Dory*. 'There's no set date for when it will be out – I've literally just written and recorded a couple of tracks, so it's a way off yet, but probably the beginning of next year.'

That's pretty good going for someone who never used to do anything on their own, though. And presumably not such an easy transition to make? 'It was very nerve-wracking coming from S-Club,' she agrees. 'I always knew what I wanted to do, that I wanted to go out there on my own and do my own stuff, but I remember doing my first performance and just realizing how exposed I was – I got very scared. Being with six other people was all I'd known, so it was quite a massive change. I noticed it mostly in interviews, funnily enough. All of us used to talk over each other, but then to actually sit in an interview for 15 minutes and for it to all be on me – it was very scary and exciting.'

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Well yes, that sounds logical – unless of course you just drown. But, talking to her, you get the feeling that was never going to happen to Rachel.

GOING BACK

Something we always wonder with stars like this is how they choose the songs they sing. In our short acquaintance we've already worked out that it's more than just a question of Rachel doing what those People tell her to do. A broad musical background is a good start: 'A lot of different artists inspire me, there's not one particular person I could say I try to follow,' she begins. 'I've been introduced to so many different things over the years. When I was young I remember listening to a lot of old soul singers and a lot of Motown bands. I grew up listening to Prince's albums over and over again, and Michael Jackson too. Do you know what I

they loved it, but I think it was slightly cooler, which took it to an older audience too, which was brilliant. Songs like that and "Some Girls" are just a bit quirky, and that's what I liked. A lot of people thought that had a kind of Blondie, Debbie Harry feel to it – which I also think is cool because she was an amazing artist.'

GOING LIVE

After a while, we get on to talking about live shows. It's not as if Rachel can hide behind the drum kit, so the pressure on her to perform must be pretty intense. Is there some secret ritual she does before coming on stage to make sure it all works out? 'To be honest I don't really do anything,' she says, to our surprise. 'I always try to be really cool and calm and collected, but I never quite manage it. I'm always really nervous and don't know what to do with myself, and always quite flustered. No matter how much time we have before a show we're always late or running up against the time – you know,

Catch up with Rachel at www.rachelstevensofficial.com

the dancers' clothes aren't on yet or something – there's always something that happens, but that's just part of the excitement of it all. No matter what I do – whether it's a gig with 10 people or 10,000 – I always get that buzz, that adrenaline rush.'

Yeah, the buzz. That's something we always want to know about when we talk to people in Rachel's line of work. Turns out her biggest buzz so far is one you might remember too: 'The one that sticks out the most is probably the Golden Jubilee.' [A couple of years ago: Buckingham Palace, fireworks, that kind of thing. Ring any bells?] 'There were massive artists performing, like Paul McCartney – it's quite an amazing thing to be a part of. I remember at the end of the show, the big finale, Paul McCartney went on to sing 'Hey Jude', and all the artists who were performing that night were on stage – it was just getting dark and all you could see was this sea of people – it was quite an amazing moment...' Rachel tails off, and for a moment we can tell she's back up there with Macca, Ozzy and the rest.

GOING DOWN

Time to bring her down to earth, then. What's the worst crime you've committed against your music collection, pop star? 'I don't really care about what's meant to be cool!' she says, defiantly. So you should be diverse and proud, huh? 'Absolutely! I remember the first *Now* album I bought was *Now 11* – what are we on now, *Now 50something?* But I love that – listening to old songs on that sort of thing, and they're probably really cheesy, but they remind me of being a kid. The first thing I ever bought was by Wham! I was a massive fan of George Michael. That's what's so amazing about music, it takes you back to certain things that happen in your life. I get all nostalgic when I hear something like "One Day In Your Life" by Michael Jackson. When that comes on it reminds me of my family, and growing up.'

GOING OUT WITH A BANG!

So it looks like Rachel is just like the rest of us (apart from the chart-topping stardom, maybe). For her and for us, music's a constant partner through life, and is a lot more than just a way of filling in the background. As for what she likes about the scene at the moment, she namechecks the Streets, Kelis and Scissor Sisters, and bigs up *etc.*'s own special friend, the 'cool' Natasha Bedingfield.

Clearly she'd be as lost as we would if

music suddenly stopped. 'Music is important because...' begins *etc.*, to see how she'll finish our sentence. 'Because without it I think it would be really *boring!* I've thought about that before but I just couldn't imagine it,' says Rachel. Good call.

We chat some more about this and that, before realising we'd better let the poor girl get back to the studio to record something else we'll no doubt hear played everywhere we go. So it's time for the meteor question. If a meteor was going to hit the Earth in five minutes, and Rachel was stuck in her room with her CD collection, what would she put on? 'Oh my God!' she exclaims, sounding genuinely worried, before giving an answer that may or may not be filled with some deep Zen wisdom: 'Maybe a bit of Bon Jovi – maybe 'Living on a Prayer'. It's quite powerful, a bit of rock...' Superbly, we have no idea if she meant the meteor or the song. We thought we'd asked her enough questions for one day. **etc.**

