

INSIGHTFUL. IMPACTFUL. INSPIRING.

ALESSIA CARA QUENCHES OUR THIRST FOR SOMETHING REAL

WORDS BY VANESSA PASCALE · PHOTO CREDIT: MEREDITH TRUAX

“I guess I have a hard time... leaving my own body and trying to see what other people see ‘cause it’s just always been me,” says Alessia Cara in response to my compliment on her amazing and unique voice. “I’m just lucky that people like what I do.” Great voices are magnetic, memorable, and moving. And this 20-year-old musician has *it*. When I first heard Alessia’s song “Wild Things” on the radio, I remember thinking, who is this? Becoming a musician has always been her dream. “I just didn’t know if I was good at it or not. Once I realized that people liked it [she showcased her talent at high school talent shows and open mics], I was like, ‘OK. I really think I can do this and I want to do this.’”

It is Halloween weekend, and Alessia and I are sitting inside Hard Rock Live Orlando. Tonight is the last show on her Know-It-All Part II U.S. tour with special guests Ruth B and Nathan Sykes. The venue is virtually empty, but in a couple of hours the Canadian singer-songwriter will be in her element — on stage singing to a crowd of dedicated fans, many of whom waited in line for 4 hours just for the Meet & Greet. She’ll play guitar, beat the drums, pepper the crowd with anecdotes, cover Amy Winehouse’s (her biggest inspiration in music) “You Know I’m No Good” — even turn the spotlight and stage over to a man with a marriage proposal for his boyfriend [he said yes!] as her fans drink it all in — singing along to her lyrics, dancing, and videoing the experience. Part II of the tour is like Part I, which took her through the U.S. and Canada in the beginning of 2016, except it’s grander. “We have big screens now with cool graphics and it’s more of a story. Everything is a lot more elevated than the last tour.”

The fresh-faced artist has her dark, wavy hair up in a ponytail and is wearing a black sweater over a tee, black pants, and white kicks. Around her neck hangs a necklace with a cross on it which she has layered with a choker. A friendly familiarity radiates from the songstress. Pretty, silly, chill, insanely talented yet modest — Alessia reminds me of the friends made in grade school and kept for life. Within the first few moments of sitting down with her, I feel like she genuinely gets it. And if you’re familiar with her music, you *know* that she gets it. She sings about what many are so often thinking, feeling. She is a voice that says what you’re afraid to say aloud, a light that illuminates the dark corners of your life and makes you feel not so alone — all of which is undoubtedly why she has accrued over 1 million Instagram followers in such a short time span.

It was just three years ago that Alessia was discovered on YouTube. “I didn’t have a YouTube following or anything I just happened to post a video and someone came across it. It was a very fate kind of thing because I never went viral or anything.” At 18 she signed with her production company EP Entertainment and began writing songs with label mate/mentor Sebastian Kole. The two co-wrote her debut album *Know-It-All* together. “For a year I was going to different labels, shopping around, hoping that someone would like me. A year later, Def Jam came into my life and I signed with them.” Today, the pop star has three of her songs from *Know-It-All*, “Here” (#5), “Wild Things” (#50), and “Scars To Your Beautiful” (#17), ranked on Billboard’s The Hot 100 chart. “Those songs would not be possible without him,” she says of Sebastian.

Her raw debut single “Here” resonated with anyone who has ever felt out of place. “That song is about a high school basement party I went to 3 years ago, that I just did not like and I felt so uncomfortable — so I just stood in the corner all night observing and just asking myself, *why did I come here?* So I started ranting about it the next day and then in the studio and this song happened.” Did you think, “This is gold. This is good”? “Yeah, honestly, I thought that the second we wrote it. I asked for a demo of it to be emailed to me and showed it to my mom and dad and was like, ‘*This is the song that is going to change my life,*’” she says so ardently that it elicits goose bumps to surface. “They didn’t like it at first, a lot of people didn’t. I was like, ‘No, guys, trust me, it’s just ‘cause it’s a demo. Once it’s all edited, fixed, and once we reproduce it, it’s going to be great. Trust me. It’s going to change my life.’ And they were like, ‘I don’t know about that.’ But it did. I was like, ‘Ha, it did. Told you, guys!’” She smiles. “Here” hit double-platinum status in the U.S., and its music video has racked up over 114 million views.

And then Coldplay asked her to join their tour (they share the same agent), where she performed in stadiums with 50,000+ people in Europe and the U.S. Mic drop. To tour with a group revered as one of the world’s best-selling music artists (they have hundreds of music nominations, dozens of wins, including 7 Grammys) is an invaluable experience for a rising star. What did you take away from your time with Chris Martin and the band? “Their artistry and their musicianship is so, so admirable. I was in awe every time I would watch. Just seeing, not only how they are on stage, how they perform, and



WE WANT MORE!

What would you say is the tone of your music? You've been compared to Lorde and Rihanna.

"Which is awesome. I love those people. It's definitely pop, it might be alternative pop. There's soul in there. There's some R&B. I don't want to say it's everywhere because I think it is still kind of cohesive. But it is kind of experimental with different genres within pop, if that makes sense."

Do you have a favorite song on the album?

"That's hard to say because I love them all, and they were all really important times in my life. Of course "Here" will always have a special place because it was the first. I love "Stone." I love "Scars." I love all of them. I'm proud of it."

Is there anyone you would like to collaborate with?

"I have a bunch of people I want to work with. I love Drake. I would love to work with him. Frank Ocean. Ed Sheeran."

What are you watching on TV?

"I love *Orange Is the New Black*. *Stranger Things*—I'm only on episode 2. I'm behind on that show, but that's a good one too."

Who are you listening to in music?

"I listen to everything. I'm really big on Anderson .Paak right now. The new Frank Ocean album, of course. A lot of Troye Sivan."



connect on stage but even off stage and how nice they are to every crew member, every person in their staff—to us, to everybody. They're just so classy and graceful and amazing," she beams. Alessia has no problem staying in good company. She was nominated along with Zayn Malik, DNCE, The Chainsmokers, and Shawn Mendes for The American Music Award's "New Artist of the Year" award. Not to get all Kanye, but Zayn, who won, and DNCE's Joe Jonas came from two mega-boybands, technically they're not "new."

Alessia's past year has been chock-full of pinch-me moments, many of which normally take artists years to accomplish. What's next? Where do you go from here? "I think the beauty of accomplishing goals is new goals come about after that or because of that," she eloquently responds. "Of course, typical artist thing would be a Grammy, that's the ideal. I would love to play my own stadiums one day. I would love to more specifically host *SNL*—that would be awesome. Voice a character in Disney. I have many interests, so we'll see what happens," says the self-proclaimed theatre kid, who'd also like to get into acting. Fortunately, Disney already has her name and number from when they recruited her to sing Lin-Manuel Miranda's song "How Far I'll Go" for their 3D computer-animated film, *Moana*. The upbeat, inspiring song will instantly put you in a good mood. I've had the song on repeat for a while now. Seriously, download it on iTunes.

On Thanksgiving night, Alessia performed "How Far I'll Go" on ABC's 2-hour TV special, *The Wonderful World of Disney: Magical Holiday Celebration* featuring an artist lineup that included Mariah Carey and Kelly Clarkson. This is one of a few holiday shows Alessia will perform at this season. After these shows, she intends to take a little break. "I'm just going to disappear for a bit, hide away, and make the next album... Maybe start writing in February and March... The first album took about a year and a bit. I don't think I'm going

to take a year, but we'll see," she replies. With the first album, they scheduled studio time to sit down and write, these days Alessia writes whenever and wherever she can find some time—in hotel rooms, backstage, even in bathrooms.

What you can expect from this songwriter is honesty. "I think it's very honest," she says about her music. "I've never put out anything I didn't believe in myself." Because some of her lyrics have painted her as a "rebel without a cause" she thinks people would be surprised to find out that she's really not an antisocial person. "I think a lot of people think that I'm just spewing out all these preachy things because I'm always mad at the world... I understand where they would get that, especially from "Here" because I seem like I'm miserable in that song. I'm definitely not that. I'm a happy person. I love people and I like exploring. I'm not as miserable as people think." She smiles. "I'm not miserable at all, actually. I would like to think I'm a good, happy-for-the-most-part person." She laughs at the inane notion.

While her album title *Know-It-All* is supposed to be tongue-in-cheek, I think Alessia knows much more than she credits herself for. The wisdom and depth in her music inspires you to be you, be strong, and ignore the naysayers. Ready to explore the world, she hopes to travel to Asia next year for some festivals. "I've never been to Asia before. Tokyo would be cool. Dubai would be awesome," she says wistfully. Like the lyrics from "How Far I'll Go" say: "If the wind in my sail on the sea stays behind me / One day I'll know / If I go there's just no telling how far I'll go." This is simply the beginning of this talented musician's epic journey—stay tuned. **ML**

Keep up with Alessia on
Instagram: @alessiamusic, Twitter: @alessiacara,
Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/alessiacara>,
and www.alessiacara.com.