

FOLLOW ME



CARRIE FISHER
ON
WRITING
POSTCARDS

OBJECTS
OF
OBSESSION

TOM HANKS:
FANNING
THE BONFIRE

H.O.
BEAUTY FROM
THE SOURCE

HOT HOLIDAY
CLOTHES

WILD CATSUITS

HEAVENLY
ANGELS

EXCLUSIVE

Kylie
vamps up

A black and white portrait of Kylie Minogue with long, wavy hair, looking directly at the camera. The background is dark. The text is overlaid on the lower half of the image.

GRANT MATTHEWS STYLING BY NICOLE BONYTHON

Kylie

VAMPS UP

It's 12 months since Follow Me last interviewed Kylie Minogue. Anne Howell caught up with her during the recording of her latest album in LA to find the 22-year-old megastar excited about her work and love, yet angry at the media for perpetuating her fluffy image

BEFORE ME LIES THE SPREAD OF

photographs in which a sultry Kylie Minogue has offered herself to the camera. There is no reminder here of the likeable but bland Charlene, a character that may have launched her into stardom but nevertheless left her with an unfashionably clean-cut image.

This new version of Kylie is all innuendo and cleavage, with large doses of defiance and sex kitten combined. A sure-fire Hollywood formula, perfected by the likes of Mansfield and Monroe. Yet the voice I am hearing down my earpiece from an LA recording studio bears none of the sophistication and audacity I see before me. It is a sunny, Aussie, little-girl voice with a discernibly cute quality. A quality, judging from these pictures, Kylie is desperate to shake.

The megastar herself has paused during the recording of her latest album to, among other things, tell of how these pictures came into existence. It was her idea to pose in various stages of nudity encouraged by accomplices in image making crime, stylist, Nicole Bonython, hair and makeup artist, Stephen Price and photographer Grant Matthews.

"It started off as just a personal shoot because so often photos have to be for a particular market and they have to be nice and clean and fun," she says. "What I've learnt now is that you have to take some risks. If you play safe all the time it's really boring. But I didn't want to go too far and be too obvious, you know what I mean?" What she means is that unlike Madonna or Sheila E. who have both turned up nude in glossies, when it came to going public in her birthday suit, Kylie's modesty prevailed.

"If you're just going to show everything then nothing would be left to the imagination. This was just a way of showing another side of me and also showing what *is* me because a lot of people don't realise there's something else behind the fluff, behind the smile."

Besides, despite easy comparisons Kylie is not your flaunt-it-all Madonna type. Her own sex appeal is less on her mind than the issues involved in grappling with the more ordinary sides of growing up. "No matter who you are you still do normal things, people are so amazed when I say yeah, I went to the movies. I can't believe they are so shocked by it. I'm 22 and I still go through the same sorts of traumas and dramas and things everyone has to go through."

Developing a stronger sense of self,

enjoying her relationship with singer Michael Hutchence and a concern for the planet are all foremost on her agenda. So is loosening the creative grip Stock, Aitken and Waterman have had so far on her musical career. When I spoke with her she was feeling the adrenalin rush involved in taking some control of her artistic output for the first time. Half the album she recorded as usual with SAW in the UK, but for the rest she went to LA to seek out her own producers and co-writers.

"I mean, I've had to do a lot of work to scout out (the songs). My brain's gone to jelly but it's really great. It's driving me crazy—it's such hard work, but I had to do it. Everyone was saying 'oh but it'll be really hard' and (telling me to) take the easy way out."

But at this stage Kylie is certain that taking the hardest road has been the right one. "It's great—it's really new for me to be co-writing and involved at every step along the way. It's just like being given free rein to say what I want to say and how I want to say it. It's incredible. People I've been writing with might ask 'Oh what do you think?' And I'll say 'who me, what do I think? Oh wow!' At Stock, Aitken and Waterman they'd write the song and I'd sing it and it was that simple. I mean I still wanted to work with them because God, they've given me 12 hits in the UK alone so you can't really argue with that."

She says taking control has given her a greater sense of personal strength, but not so much that the old self-critical Kylie has been obliterated. "I'm getting stronger and it's such a good feeling. I wouldn't like to be so strong that nothing affects me. You see some people and they just seem so together. I mean you feel God—I wonder if they have any feelings left? I'm still vulnerable, still not very confident in myself. But I think they're good qualities because I'm always looking at myself, re-evaluating what I'm doing but I'm heading in the right direction."

Ironically, gaining confidence to go out on her own has been no easy task for Kylie who despite playing live to audiences of tens of thousands, professes actually to be "a shy person". In her quest for confidence Hutchence has, she says, had an incredible influence. "I mean, if you're having a good relationship you can expect to be affected in all sorts of ways. Michael just sort of encourages me to be myself, to go after my dreams, to go for what I want. I think that is the most important thing... he gives me confidence. He knows a lot anyway so he can

give me advice. We don't have like a kind of work relationship—we both do our own things with work. For too long my kind of relationships were mixed in with work and I really didn't know where the line was. Now I'm in a position where I can step back and say this is work, this is my relationship."

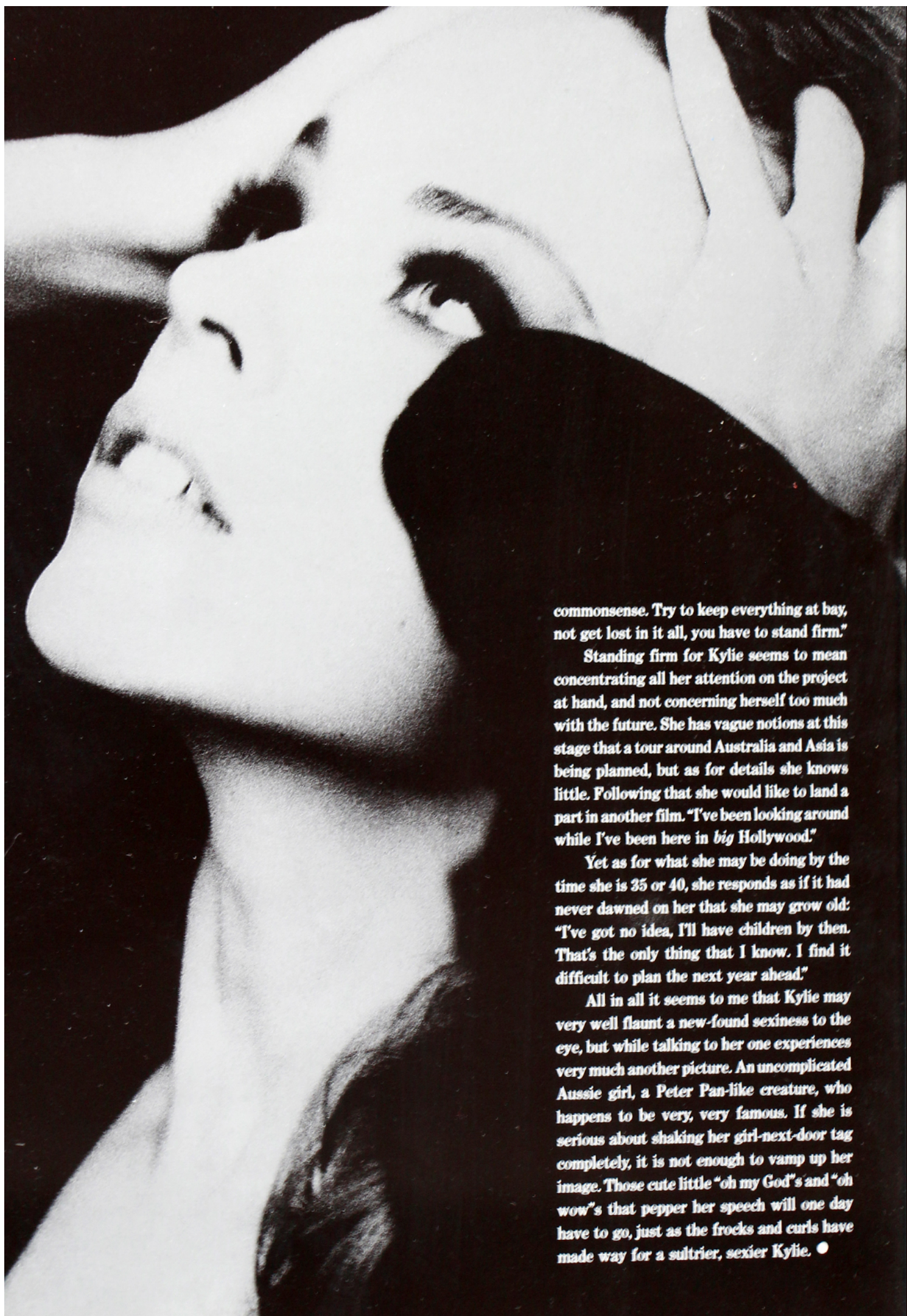
She may have been in the limelight since she was 17, but she has not become blasé about the not so ordinary aspects of her life, like the vitriol she suffers regularly at the hands of the press. Since her liaison with Hutchence began, the press, especially in the UK, has had a field day. "Even though we are not engaged, we've been married (in the press) four times so far. I guess I can't blame them—they see it as a bit of hot gossip to put in their paper but Michael has never been dragged through the tabloids before over such a range of petty, insignificant subjects."

"I'm as used to being public as I'm going to be. I don't like it. You can't appreciate anonymity until you lose it. It's been great in the US because nobody knows who I am, so I can just observe what's going on around me which is really important if you're acting. Everywhere else I'm being watched and feel like burying my face in my hands."

She admits one of the hardest lessons for her has been to learn to value only the opinions of people that matter. "I read and I hear so much nasty stuff (about me). I couldn't say it doesn't affect me because it does. I mean you're only human. I try not to believe a lot of the bad stuff. I sometimes read quotes that are actually good but I never said them."

In her opinion, why has she become the target of so much parody and negative comment? She suggests because it doesn't require much imagination to take a shot at her. "I'm a really easy target—for someone to hang shit on me is dead simple. Sometimes your life is thrown around as if it is play material. The thing I try to remember is that no matter where your photo turns up, selling doona covers or pillow slips, no matter what is written and no matter what is said, I'm my own person. That's the thing I really try to remember—I'm me, I have my soul and my spirit." Realising that her words are taking her into serious waters, she lets loose a laugh.

Yet does all she say about the down side of fame, mean she has regrets? When you are famous, she responds, the damage is done and, "You have to make the most of it otherwise you'll end up a recluse and I can see how easy that would be. The main thing is to have



commonsense. Try to keep everything at bay, not get lost in it all, you have to stand firm."

Standing firm for Kylie seems to mean concentrating all her attention on the project at hand, and not concerning herself too much with the future. She has vague notions at this stage that a tour around Australia and Asia is being planned, but as for details she knows little. Following that she would like to land a part in another film. "I've been looking around while I've been here in *big* Hollywood."

Yet as for what she may be doing by the time she is 35 or 40, she responds as if it had never dawned on her that she may grow old: "I've got no idea, I'll have children by then. That's the only thing that I know. I find it difficult to plan the next year ahead."

All in all it seems to me that Kylie may very well flaunt a new-found sexiness to the eye, but while talking to her one experiences very much another picture. An uncomplicated Aussie girl, a Peter Pan-like creature, who happens to be very, very famous. If she is serious about shaking her girl-next-door tag completely, it is not enough to vamp up her image. Those cute little "oh my God"s and "oh wow"s that pepper her speech will one day have to go, just as the frocks and curls have made way for a sultrier, sexier Kylie. ●