

# Kesha in Control

The chart-topping singer who soared to stardom with a gives-zero-fucks attitude is back. And this time, she does care...about a lot of things. Get to know the new, appealingly vulnerable, "sometimes" confident, still incredibly talented artist.

★  
Big Bud Press jumpsuit. Mimi Holliday bra. Brian Atwood heels. Joanna Laura Constantine bracelet. Arme De L'Amour necklace (top). Vanessa Mooney necklace (bottom). Kesha's own nose ring (worn throughout)

By Jessica Herndon Photographed by Jason Kim  
Stylist: Kristen Saladino

# It's dusk in Los Angeles, and Kesha is swinging her long, layered hair back and forth

to the beat of Joy Division's "Love Will Tear Us Apart." "Yesss!" calls out *Cosmo's* on-set photographer Jason Kim, as Kesha pauses to stare directly into his camera, doing her best to hold a sexy pout without blinking. The 31-year-old musical phenom lasts about 10 seconds, then bursts out laughing.

In the moment, relaxed and smiling, she oozes realness—and a vulnerability that feels at odds with the Kesha who rocketed to fame in 2009 with a DGAF 'tude and even more DGAF lyrics (see "Brush my teeth with a bottle of Jack" and "Ain't got a care in the world, but got plenty of beer" from her hit single "Tik Tok"). "I thought I had to be very tough and really strong and portray that I didn't give a fuck, and that just was not the case," she says now. "I was pretending like everything was great all the time."

The truth is that acting like the bold party girl from her songs took a toll—especially since, in private, she was often racked with insecurities. After nearly five years and two successful albums, "I was nervous about everything, and it was so exhausting," she remembers. "The final straw was when I was with my mom at a family dinner party and I was so anxious. Driving home, I had to pull over, and I was like, I can't keep this secret anymore." That secret included a serious eating disorder, for which Kesha checked herself into a treatment facility in 2014.

"It was scary, but I finally put my foot down and chose life. That was a huge turning point," she says. "I'm not a size. I'm not a number. I am a strong, badass motherfucking woman, and quite frankly, I like my junk. Ten years ago, I never thought I'd be able to say that."

Also reinvented: her sound. *Rainbow* is Kesha's first album since 2012—and the first she's released since the start of her multiyear legal battle with her former producer Lukasz "Dr. Luke" Gottwald, in which she has accused him of emotional and sexual abuse. (Dr. Luke denies the claims and has sued Kesha for defamation; Kesha is currently appealing the dismissal of her abuse claims in New York.) Absent from her new music is the familiar Auto-Tune, replaced by a blend of rock and roll, country, and pop. Lyrically, she covers everything from exorcising emotional demons ("Don't let the assholes wear you out. Don't let the mean girls take the crown") to expressing deep love ("I know forever don't exist. But after this life, I'll find you in the next").

This time around, recording was cathartic, if very hard. She often needed encouragement to "get through the days I wouldn't feel very strong," she says. Her boyfriend, artist Brad Ashenfelter, and her assistant "would put my ass in the car and drive me to the studio and

THE MOST UNEXPECTED THING IN MY BAG RIGHT NOW:

magic rocks



THE ANIMAL THAT I FEEL MOST CONNECTED TO:



felines— all of em

THE LAST PHOTO I TOOK ON MY PHONE WAS OF:

my cats, my new scar on my knee from ACL surgery



PEOPLE WOULD BE SURPRISED THAT I'M FRIENDLY WITH:

Alice Cooper

AN UP-AND-COMING ARTIST I LOVE:

Lemon Twigs they're amazing

A SONG THAT MAKES ME WANT TO DANCE:

1994 Pop, Just for Life

IF I WASN'T A MUSICIAN, THIS IS A JOB I MIGHT TRY:

scuba dive instructor

BECAUSE:

I wanna be a mermaid



★  
RIXO London top. Joanna Laura Constantine bracelet (left arm). Vanessa Mooney bracelets (right arm) and necklace. Eriness ring (left). Child of Wild ring (right)



MERMAID: EVERETT COLLECTION. ALL OTHER QUIZ PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES.

Dear lovely and fabulous  
Cosmo readers, thank you  
for all the love and support  
with my latest record  
♥ KESHA



★  
Norma Kamali jacket. Kesha's own top.  
Topshop skirt.  
Golden Goose Deluxe Brand boots. Pascale Monvoisin earring (left). Lana Jewelry earring (right)

be like 'Bye!' Then I would write, and pain would turn into art, and the art would turn into healing, and the healing turned into a record. And then I was nominated for a Grammy! Life is fucking crazy."

At those Grammys in January, Kesha's intense performance—alongside Cyndi Lauper, Julia Michaels, Andra Day, Camila Cabello, and Bebe Rexha—of her single "Praying" went viral, slaying any doubts about her comeback. The moment, thought by many to be the best of the night, was touted as a fierce symbol of female empowerment. Backstage, Kesha knew there was a lot on the line. "I was the most nervous I've ever been," she says. But then she and the other women gathered into a huddle and put their hands in the middle. "They were like, '[Let's say] Kesha on three.' I was like, 'No, no, no. *Praying*, all of us, on three.' But instead, they said my name, and I burst into tears. Those women didn't owe me anything. It just took my breath away—that feeling of having people be there for you."

Since then, Kesha has been able to savor her success while still acknowledging the dark times in her past. "I've found that some of my strongest moments have been when I've allowed myself to feel the sadder emotions," she says. "I'm happy to be sometimes comfortable and sometimes confident. I don't know that I'll ever be at peace with everything. I'm still growing and changing and learning and fucking up."

She hopes that speaking openly about her challenges and progress will be a positive force for others. "I definitely feel like I can connect with my fans over feeling bullied or lonely or imperfect," she says. "It just boils down to being a human being." For her part, Kesha is backed up by a solid support system—including Brad and her three "cat children"—daily meditation, yoga, and downtime both by herself and with friends. "We go hiking during the day and go to dive bars at night," she says.

As she sets off on her 30-city Adventures of Kesha and Macklemore

tour, the singer will be packing her new perspective. "I've taken ownership of myself," she says. "I'm taking control of my life and my name and the music it's attached to."

Her fans will probably notice the difference, she notes, but they shouldn't worry. The \$ as the S in her name may be gone, but "I'm not, like, a sad sap now. There are a couple of ballads, but my show is still extremely fun. I'm not going to be less crazy. There's an awesome band, and there's dancing and glitter. That's a promise I will keep—there will always be glitter." ■



★  
Jeremy Scott jacket. Kesha's own top.  
Topshop skirt.  
Child of Wild ring (ring finger).  
Pascale Monvoisin ring (middle finger) and necklace (middle). Arme De L'Amour necklace (left).  
Vanessa Mooney necklace (right)

SOMETHING PEOPLE GET WRONG ABOUT ME:

They think I brush my teeth with whiskey, every day.... I mean, **EVERY DAY!**



THE MOMENT IN MY LIFE I'M PROUDEST OF:

my Grammy performance (very intense)

ONE THING I WANT TO SEE HAPPEN FOR WOMEN IN MY LIFETIME:

equality. real, actual equality.

MY MOST OVERUSED WORD/PHRASE:

FTW



WHEN I WAS MAKING RAINBOW, THIS SONG WAS THE BIGGEST SURPRISE:

Singing "Old Flames" with Dolly Parton... BECAUSE: she agreed to sing with me.

Hair: Mark Townsend for Dove Hair Care at Starworks Artists. Makeup: Vittorio Masecchia at Opus Beauty using Pacifica Beauty. Manicure: Miho Okawara. See page 155 for shopping information.