



L R U O C S Y E

Not too long ago, singer-songwriter Lucy Rose considered hanging up the acoustic. Thankfully a fan-powered tour around South America changed her mind. Now with a new album and incredible Glastonbury performance under her belt, could this be her most successful year yet?

WORDS: GEORGE HENRY KING PHOTOS: LAURA LEWIS PHOTOGRAPHY

As an eerie silence engulfs the entirety of a fancy North London gastropub, an infectious outburst of laughter disrupts the peace.

The culprit is Lucy Rose – one of the UK's hardest-working troubadours, famed for her subtle, tear-jerking vocal, poetic lyricism and compelling compositions.

Today, the 28-year-old is in good spirits: polite and approachable; relaxed, yet engaged. Most importantly, she's happy – which, she says, has not always been the case in recent times.

"I lost faith in myself and in my music," she openly admits. "I allowed the music industry to make me feel like I was unsuccessful. That's not their fault – it's as much my fault for letting it effect me. I was living my dream as a musician, but I was unhappy.

"The only real success in life is living a life where you're happy – and it's not easy to just be happy. Having just got married, I felt maybe it would just be easier if we went and lived in the Lake District to run a teahouse!"

Thankfully her current outlook on both life and the music industry is a far cry from the doubt-filled one she harboured towards the end of her last album campaign. But at the time, the prospect of swapping music for cream teas was looking more and more appealing.

Her poppier, top 10 second album, *Work It Out*, received a critically lukewarm response – despite Rose adopting a more commercial sound and a 'cooler, edgier' onstage demeanour. It was an album not a million miles away from its predecessor, *Like I Used To*, but the creeping influence of a major label was evident and her artistic identity was on the brink of extinction as a result.

Upon reflection, Rose admits that her career at that point wasn't a completely true portrayal of the artist she wanted to be. Something had to change, and that's exactly what happened.

In 2016, Rose bravely instigated her departure from her then-label, Columbia Records, after they refused to commit to giving her complete creative control over her next record. The prospect of no major label backing, however, meant financial insecurity loomed. But if that meant breaking free from the shackles of a major label, scrutinizing and manipulating every inch of her artistic output, then it was a risk worth taking.

"Everything is controlled," she candidly states. "I love the last record and I tried really hard. But is that who I am and is that what I'm meant to be doing? The whole system is broken and no-one wants to take a risk and so the potential and development of artists isn't being allowed to come through. As much as I want to moan about the things that I went through, they were all my choices and I had no one else to blame apart from myself. I had to split ways with Sony [the owners of Columbia] because it just didn't work for me and I know that now."

For the first time in five years, Lucy was without stability and in limbo. But with no third album deadlines to meet, no boring marketing meetings to sit through and no gigs to play, she decided to use the opportunity to take some much-needed time off from the music industry in order to pursue something she'd always wanted to do – go travelling.

"There's a part of me that's always wanted to travel, but I've never found the right moment. I've always been putting my career first and

never had time to do something for me. So, initially I just wanted to go and see some of the world and I think I was probably just trying to escape everything for a bit."

Somewhat unsurprisingly, however, Rose's plan to just 'go and see some of the world' didn't last very long, and neither did her time away from music.

Before even stepping foot on a plane, she made the unlikeliest of discoveries. The two cities outside of London that were streaming her music the most on Spotify were Mexico City and São Paulo – two places that she'd never played and two places where she'd never had a label distributing her music.

The accessibility of Spotify had played a huge part in connecting Rose's music with fans she never knew she had. Despite initially being weary of the potentially damaging effects the streaming service could have on the longevity of artists, this revelation made her realise something: with new music channels, music is no longer something you can only enjoy if you can afford it. Traveling for personal reasons may have been the initial plan, but the idea of being without a guitar in the very places that her fans had been so desperate for her to visit didn't sit well with her. As she puts it: "I felt guilty and it felt quite sinful."

Armed only with an acoustic guitar, a backpack and very little in the way of expectation, Rose set off on a pilgrimage to South America. Fans organised her shows and offered up accommodation. For Rose – an acclaimed artist, familiar with selling-out some of the UK's most prestigious music venues – it was new territory, but one she went into with confidence.



“The whole [major label] system is broken and no one wants to take a risk; the potential of artists isn’t being allowed to come through”

“I wasn’t sceptical, but I knew I was asking a huge amount from them. It doesn’t seem like a big ask when you’re like ‘just find me somewhere to play’, but some of my fans are really shy people – people who don’t have the courage to just walk into venues and talk to the owner. No-one was paid. It was just a case of finding the right venue that would say ‘alright you can come here for the evening and have it for free’. The venues were amazing.”

Before long, the trip’s momentum really took hold. The number of moments worthy of sprawling across social media were outgrowing Twitter’s measly character allowance and so, along with husband-come-tour manager, William Morris, Rose started documenting the entirety of the trip for a film that will accompany the album. Roads were forced to close as Rose euphorically played to 1,200 screaming fans from above a launderette, her days off turned into 16-hour bus rides to and from places not accessible via plane and on the odd occasion, she even had to do her own sound – something that had varying results.

“It was amazing because it made me realise what I was capable of and, as with any form of travelling, you find out what you’re made of a little bit more when it’s a bit tricky. I liked going back to basics, but it made me grateful of the amount of times I can walk into a venue and everything is plugged in and ready to go.”

Without initially realising, Rose’s mere decision to visit fans in South America had become a voyage of self-discovery – an unexpected form of catharsis that vitally helped her to regain her love of music. For every stranger’s act of kindness, a glimmer of belief in her own ability was re-instilled. For every teary fan hanging on her every word, a sense of purpose would sweep over her. She was adored there – perhaps more so than she’s ever been in the UK. She was seen as a beacon of hope; a strong, independent woman inspiring young girls in a place where opportunity is sparse. She was impacting on their lives in ways she could never possibly imagine – and their rapport was having a similar effect on Rose. They had become the inspiration she needed.

“There was this guy called Fernando. I was just playing some chords and singing some random words and I looked over and he was crying. He said, ‘it means something to me, you’ve got to finish that song’. So then when it came to songwriting, I knew I just needed to write a song for one person and for it to matter.”

“The trip really inspired me to write another record and I was hoping that it would do that and that it would help me work out in some way why I wrote songs in the first place – which it definitely did, but I never knew it would do it in the way that it did and so drastically. I came home and it had really changed everything.”

The spontaneity of both the trip and the song Rose refers to arguably become the lynchpin for the entire record. It was finished within just 17 days and most parts were played simultaneously by a variety of musicians in the same room: an approach producer Tim Bidwell relished, but one Rose had to learn to embrace.

“It was just about trusting your instincts more and not questioning it,” she explains.



“Tim definitely helped me commit. I think every song is with an acoustic guitar on this record, so it’s really back to basics and that’s what I wanted – a real organic record like the Neil Young or Joni Mitchell records.”

And having now teamed up with Communion Records – an independent music label that was founded by Mumford and Sons’ Ben Lovett – Rose is finally working amidst like-minded individuals who aren’t profit-driven and who care about music as much as she does. They’ve allowed her the freedom to write and record an album – appropriately-titled *Something’s Changed* – that she can proudly and whole-heartedly call her own and in doing so, she has finally achieved the level of musicianship that she knew she was capable of. “I’ve achieved something that I’ve always dreamed of with this record, within the song writing and in the way I’ve recorded it and I’ve committed to the way I wanted to record it. I’d always felt like I was capable of writing some great songs, but I felt like I hadn’t done it yet. But when I was writing it [the new album], I knew it was going to be the best record I’ve ever made because I’ve written it for all the right reasons and it’s the truest. I knew there wasn’t going to be a song on it that the radio could play, but I literally didn’t give a shit about who would like it and who wouldn’t like it. I just wanted the fans that I had to like it.”

As our time together comes to an end, Rose and I take a moment to discuss being a woman

GEARBOX
Lucy relives the moment she met her Martin:

“I didn’t have a guitar that could be plugged in. A lot of people said Martin and Taylor guitars were pretty good. So, I went into a shop and tried a few out and there was thing one in particular that I fell in love with: a three quarter sized guitar and it was a Martin 000C16 GTE and it had a cutaway. I used to like to play things quite high, so a cutaway was quite important. I know you lose some of the body of the sound, but that was what I wanted and I’d play ‘Shiver’ up there and it would be too hard without it. Martins are beautiful guitars and I’ve always, always loved them. Mine is just getting better with age like all their guitars.”

in music. It’s a discussion that lasts for at least 15 minutes, but one that needs to be had. Having been in the industry for eight years, Rose has been on the receiving end of sexism on an alarming number of occasions.

She therefore has a hardened view of the situation we, in 2017, still bafflingly find ourselves in.

“I feel like a woman has to prove herself so much more within her song writing,” she says, sitting up, re-invigorated.

“No-one wants to say that it’s harder being a female musician as opposed to a male musician – but it certainly is. People want a solution, but I don’t know if there is a solution until people are aware of it.

“There’s so much sexism going on all the time. Men can pick up a guitar and go to a pub and feel safe, but I remember doing open mic nights and there would be little sexist comments. If I think of female singer-songwriters who play acoustic guitar, I think of Laura Marling who is phenomenal and deserves to be way bigger. But I can think of so many male ones who are doing the same thing. Who are the female icons to inspire young girls to do it?”

It’s a question I ponder for a few minutes, frantically trying to think of an answer. In my head I consider all the qualities someone would need to be worthy of ‘icon’ status.

I settle on ‘inspirational’, ‘successful’ and ‘defiant’, and as Rose looks back at me, intrigued by my thoughts, I realise the answer was in front of me all along. ■

Lucy Rose’s new album *Something’s Changing* is out now through Communion Records