

The coolest person on the planet

ELLA GAUCI SPEAKS to Beth Ditto about Gossip's reunion, being a queer icon, and that infamous NME cover



When you think of Gossip's front-woman Beth Ditto, a few things might come to mind. Maybe you'd recall her spine-chillingly powerful voice which has often been compared to the likes of Etta James or Tina Turner. Perhaps you might start humming the chorus of Heavy Cross. You might even picture her infamous nude NME cover shoot which officially cemented her as the "coolest person on the planet".

American indie rock band Gossip provided a recognisable thumping beat for the early noughties. The trio, composed of Beth, guitarist Nathan "Brace Paine" Howdeshell, and drummer Hannah Blilie, were catapulted to stardom by their album *Standing In The Way Of Control* in 2006. Across their impressive 17-year run, Gossip entranced fans with their post-punk revival garage rock. Their iconic song *Heavy Cross* even spent 82 consecutive weeks on the German Top 100 in 2011!

Much to punk's despair, Gossip disbanded in 2016. Beth went on to pursue a number of solo projects, including her album *Fake Sugar*, and an acting career, starring in Gus Van Sant's 2018 film *Don't Worry, He Won't Get Far On Foot*. It wasn't long, however, before Gossip gravitated back together in the recording studio in 2019. From there, a reunion was inevitable.

Despite her infamous fringe and killer eyeliner, Beth Ditto is far

from intimidating. She joins our call gushing about how she never wants to take down her Christmas decorations.

Beth is back at the helm of Gossip with their new album, *Real Power*. Produced by the one and only Rick Rubin, it explores the power of chosen family and collective trauma. "It just kind of fell into place," she explains. "It's funny: there was no big idea behind it. We're not known as big planners. We're full of surprises."

Throughout her career, Beth has always centred queerness at the heart of her music. Songs like *Standing In The Way Of Control* became anthems for queer love. Having grown up in the Bible Belt state of Arkansas, providing the queer community with visibility is deeply important to her.

"When I was coming up, people were asking whether I was worried about Gossip being pigeon-holed as a queer band," she says. "I was like: no, these are the people who give us an audience. These are the people who I



"Any Gossip creation comes from a place of queer radical feminist love and life"



Photo: Cady Critchell

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want to be around. This is the party I want to go to.”

The punk and alt-rock scene has provided a safe space for the LGBTQIA community – look no further than The Slits or Bikini Kill’s *Rebel Girl*. It’s a genre that celebrates queerness and rejects heteronormative society. But for Beth, the power of queer music transcends all genres. From George Michael to the Indigo Girls, there is a certain magic to hearing queer songs from queer artists.

“Any Gossip creation comes from a place of queer radical feminist love and life,” Beth enthuses. “When you listen to songs by queer people as a queer person you hear them on a different note. It’s like a dog whistle. We connect to that in a completely different way because it’s a song that

we relate to on a deeper level.”

Alongside providing some of the biggest tracks of the last two decades, Beth has also become a queer icon in the fashion world. She’s collaborated with Jean Paul Gaultier, launched her own fashion line, and has always fought for size inclusivity in the clothing industry. Right now, she’s digging the 90s revival in fashion, as well as crocheting her own clothes.

One of Beth’s most iconic fashion moments, however, happened when she wasn’t wearing any clothes at all. In 2007, she posed nude on the cover of *NME*, catapulting the body positivity movement into the mainstream media. It would later become one of the most infamous magazine covers of the 00s and was hailed as a milestone moment for

queer visibility. But what does Beth remember about that photoshoot? “I had started my period that morning. The only thing on my mind was hoping that I didn’t bleed all over the place,” she laughs.

Twenty five years after Gossip was formed, she is still the embodiment of punk. *Real Power* is a testament to the fact that queer voices will never be silenced... especially not if Beth Ditto can help it.

“A queer love song is a radical love song,” she concludes. “When you listen to those queer artists it feels like home. You feel seen. I want people to feel like they’re a part of it.” **D**

Gossip’s new album *Real Power* comes out on 22 March



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