

Halima's big night out

ELLA GAUCI chats with the Brooklyn-based, UK/Nigerian singer about her new album, queer clubbing and feeling seen

In Halima's Cocoa Body video, shimmering, beautiful bodies move together like a single pulse. Black queer joy radiates as people shine, groove and flirt, the sensual track pulling us straight onto the dancefloor. Bathed in hazy nightclub light, the scene drips with noughties glamour, while Halima's "genre-full" beats conjure a world of sticky, sweaty nights and irresistible abandon. You can almost feel the heat around you.

This is precisely what Halima wants to achieve with her debut album, *SWEET TOOTH*. Framed as one long night out, this album resists categorisation. The musician has curated her sound from around the world, drawing inspiration from nightclub floors and bathroom chats to create a sound like no other. Following the success of her 2024 EP *EXU* – celebrated by *Clash Magazine*, *The Fader* and *BBC Radio* – Halima is returning to give us something to keep us warm this winter.

We've all had those nights out that we never want to forget. Floors dripping with spilt drinks, music so divine it still plays when you sleep and memories that loop again and again. Halima tells me that the concept for *SWEET TOOTH* came to her serendipitously. "My girlfriend is a DJ, so I've just been on one long night out over the last few years," she laughs.

It's rare to find sapphic representation in genres like R&B, garage or soul music. Halima sees her new project as an ode to the queer nightlife scene, which helped her discover herself. "It's really important to be aware of the history of queer nightlife and how it has impacted so much of today's culture," she explains. For Halima, an incredibly important moment of her own journey was partying in Lagos, where she saw how queerness was "rooted in the culture". "It was so affirming and so healing for

my inner child, because I had grown up feeling so much shame."

To call Halima a globetrotter is perhaps a bit of an understatement. The singer was born in the US, but grew up in Lagos until the age of six. It was there that she first discovered her love of music through a dance recital. Adorned in a red two-piece, necklaces and beads, she was blown away by the feeling of singing, dancing and performing. Halima moved to London, where she formed a band with two friends from primary school. It was clear that music was something she wanted to do forever.

While Halima's gorgeously queer music videos have been helping Black queer people feel seen, it took her some time to feel like she belonged there too. "For a long time, I felt like my queerness was almost independent of my Blackness," Halima shares. It wasn't until she moved to New York aged 18 and went to the infamous club *The Box* that she truly felt like she became the person she is today. Halima laughs when recounting the time she saw a performer sewing up a prosthetic vulva and being blown away by the experience. "Everyone was so unabashedly themselves in a way that felt really invigorating. I came from a Conservative area and a very traditional family, so I hadn't been exposed to much at all. Going there really blew the gates wide open."

Halima's *SWEET TOOTH* feels

dancefloor-ready, and I can picture the clubs around me playing its sultry sounds. When I ask where she hopes this music goes, Halima takes a moment to compose herself. It's clear that giving back to the nightlife scene, which welcomed her with open arms, is about much more than providing banging tunes. It's deeply emotional.

"I hope that queer listeners know that it's for them first and foremost," she says tearfully. "I hope they really feel an ownership and a claim to it. I just want queer nightlife parties or clubs predominantly to be like, 'We're championing this because this is adding to our history.'" **D**



Halima's guide for a good night out

The perfect song at pre-drinks

Saoko by Rosalía.

My go-to dance move at the club

Two-step with a bit of a spin.

The best place for chatting in the club

In the bathroom for days with the girls, putting on their lip gloss.

Must-have food on the way home

In London, definitely chips and a kebab. In New York, it'd be something from Popeyes or the bodega. In Lagos, some jollof rice in the fridge hits different at 4am.

Photo: Bellamy Brewster

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