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DESIGNERS AND POP STARS ARE MORE OBSESSED WITH EACH OTHER THAN EVER BEFORE, BUT WHAT FUELS THIS ONGOING LOVE AFFAIR? DONATELLA VERSACE, RICCARDO TISCI, ITALO ZUCCHELLI, CHRISTOPHER BAILEY, AND MORE SHED LIGHT ON THE HARMONY BETWEEN FASHION AND MUSIC

"Could you imagine a world without fashion? Without music? Life would be so boring," says Donatella Versace. It would probably be a snooze without sex and chocolate, too. But the latter duo isn't inextricably linked (depending on what you're into, of course). Fashion and music are. And over the past few years, the two industries have become completely infatuated with each other.

There's something particularly intense about today's stars and their endless high fashion finery. Lady Gaga, Miley Cyrus, Rihanna, Nicki Minaj, Katy Perry – these musicians and more are drenching themselves in designer duds, and making damn sure the world knows about it via Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and their song lyrics (Jay Z's "Tom Ford," anyone?).

The marriage between fashion and music is nothing new. What would the '80s have been without Grace Jones and Azzedine Alaïa's holy alliance? The violet hooded Alaïa gown

Jones debuted in 1985 still serves as a point of reference, even for Versace, who based her S/S '14 couture collection around it. Then we have Madonna and Jean Paul Gaultier, who shocked the '90s with that sateen conical bustier (not o mention Madge's topless turn on JPG's runway in 1992). In her heyday, Cher almost exclusively appeared in her friend Bob Mackie's outré ensembles. The Notorious B.I.G. was rarely seen without some iteration of Versace's gilded medusa. The list goes on.

"In the '70s, music and fashion were hugely intertwined," Rihanna – Mel Ottenberg. Fashion houses would have been offers Vanessa Friedman, the chief fashion critic at the New crazy not to capitalize on pop stars' mass appeal, especially York Times. "David Bowie used fashion really effectively. So during the rise of social media, when musicians and their did the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. The music industry clothes were more visible than ever before. "[Our society is] has always understood the importance of image and the uses of clothing in that context." Indeed, but screaming devotees in the audiences of yore didn't necessarily know that Mick more – they're talking about what Rihanna was wearing."

Jagger was donning an Ossie Clark jumpsuit, or that Bowie's outrageous wardrobe was the work of Kansai Yamamoto. Conversely, you can bet your ass that fans know RiRi was in custom Givenchy, Lanvin, Raf Simons, and Adam Selman during her Diamonds tour, or that Cyrus was twerking in Jeremy Scott throughout her cycle of Bangerz.

"It feels like, in the '90s for example, there was a more 'costume design' approach to fashion collaborations with pop stars," says Italo Zucchelli, the creative director of Calvin Klein Collection's menswear range. "Today, I think the approach is more synergistic. Musicians are wearing clothes from designer collections, or things that are adapted and relate more to what fashion houses are presenting on the runways. This makes it more in sync with the designer's original message, and also translates better into a commercially viable product." Zucchelli would know, seeing as he garbed Drake for his Would You Like a Tour? performances, and has whipped up custom looks for cover star Sam Smith's ongoing In the Lonely Hour tour.

These days, stars aren't merely wearing designer clothes – they're all but taking the place of models. "When I started my career in the 1970s, models were only models and musicians were only musicians," says Roberto Cavalli, who has dressed megawatt stars like Katy Perry, Janet Jackson, and Beyoncé. "Now, the musicians are the models. They walk in the shows, they are on the covers of magazines, and they are in the advertising campaigns." (Cyrus for Marc Jacobs, Lady Gaga and now Madonna for Versace, Erykah Badu for Givenchy, Rihanna for Balmain, and Rita Ora for Roberto Cavalli are a few recent examples.)

Sure, in the age of social media and celebrity infatuation, it's easy to assume that this is all just clever marketing. And on some level, it is. But on another, it's fueled by our hyperconnected click-and-thou-shalt-receive world, pop culture's multidisciplinary evolution, and a genuine union of creative creatures.

"The old 20th-century boundaries disappeared a long time ago," argues Versace. "Today, creative people don't limit themselves in what they do. If they're rock stars, they're thinking about their image. It's part of their character, how they express their true selves. For designers like me, the passion and energy of music is always feeding my design process. Why keep isolated and pretend these worlds aren't completely connected?"

However, those boundaries are still fresh in Diesel artistic director and stylist Nicola Formichetti's memory. "When I first dabbled in music, it was with Lady Gaga. My first music video was 'Bad Romance,' and I remember the industry being really anti pop music," he recalls. "People used to say, 'Why are you working with a musician? You work in high fashion!' It was very snobby. In fact, the first time I worked with Gaga on a fashion shoot for V[61], I had to lie and say I was pulling for a model, because no one would lend me clothes for a musician."

The late Lee Alexander McQueen was the exception. Lady Gaga actually debuted her "Bad Romance" track at McQueen's S/S '10 show, and the designer lent his Atlantis creations (including those divine armadillo shoes) for the song's music video. "With pop music you had this code - you had to be sexy and commercial," says Formichetti. "You couldn't be too edgy or high fashion. But Lady Gaga treated her image like performance art. Now it's a must. Pop stars have to wear high fashion." Formichetti no longer runs into lending snafus – brands throw clothes at him and his musical pals, including his latest sartorial protégé, Brooke Candy. "Nicola and I have an amazing creative relationship," says Candy, who broke into the mainstream after Formichetti transformed her from a racy DIY stripper-turned-rapper into an (equally racy) designer-clad glamazon. "I've got 100 personalities and 100 looks to match each and every one of them. He helps me to be a better version of myself, and that is an almost impossible job."

Lady Gaga broke down barriers, but her very public embrace of high fashion isn't the only reason the industry now welcomes pop stars into its ivory tower. For starters, it's no coincidence that Lady Gaga's haute explosion – and fashion houses' sudden acceptance of pop stars – hit circa 2009 at the peak of the recession. "Everything was so depressing, and it almost seemed like luxury was going to be over. But then these pop stars came along and they were able to make people dream big," says V contributor – and stylist to celebrity-obsessed," Ottenberg says. "And people at work aren't really talking about the new Vogue Italia editorial any-

Cavalli asserts that pop star endorsements lead to sales bumps, and are more powerful than ad campaigns. (Not surprising, considering Rihanna or Cyrus followers exceed any major magazine's subscribers by millions.) "Pop stars have a global presence and powerful influence over their fans. I think that the vision of a pop star looking beautiful and confident on a red carpet will always create a bigger impact over a flat advertisement."

Furthermore, this union has helped catapult fashion which is often perceived as elitist or closed off – into the limelight, exposing houses like Moschino, Givenchy, Maison Martin Margiela (thank you, Kanye West), and Hood by Air to mass audiences. Never mind what Rihanna and cover girl FKA twigs have done for emerging talents, instantly validating such designers on-the-rise as Adam Selman, Melitta Baumeister, and Marques'Almeida.

"Musicians...usually want to make daring statements with clothes – sometimes in a very overt way and sometimes in a more sophisticated and subtle manner," says Zucchelli, who has reaped the benefits of mainstream exposure through his collaborations with musicians. "As a designer, it's very stimulating to be part of this process, and it allows me to connect with an audience that is in tune with youth and popular culture, which is extremely important today."

But visibility isn't the only thing brands gain from working with pop stars. Friedman proposes that dressing musicians can change the way a fashion house is percieved, making it seem more current or relevant. "Look at the case of Lanvin menswear," she says. "So many male rock stars wear Lanvin to the Grammys or on the red carpet. It's been interesting how that has given the brand an edge it might not otherwise have had. Musicians can make [a label] seem hip or cool. On the other hand, it can also feel a little desperate."

Some houses go beyond simply swathing stars in their clothes. Burberry invites bands to play at its shows (James Bay was the S/S '15 headliner), comissions tunes for its fashion films, and went so far as to launch a platform to support emerging musicians (all of whom are handpicked by chief creative and executive officer, Christopher Bailey). "Music is an integral part of Burberry," Bailey says. "It touches everything we do, from our runway shows and events to our Burberry Acoustic platform and campaigns." Similarly, Saint Laurent's Hedi Slimane constantly champions up-and-coming bands, shoots his musician friends (like Courtney Love, Beck, and Marilyn Manson) for Saint Laurent's ads, and pulls inspiration from L.A.'s rock-and-roll lifestyle. Chanel, too, fits into this category. Who could forget that time Florence Welch crooned in a seashell during the S/S '12 show, or when Sébastien Tellier performed alongside a 12-piece orchestra at the S/S '14 couture outing? If only to outdo himself, last December, Karl Lagerfeld tapped Pharrell Williams to compose a song, "CC the World," for a video teasing Chanel's 2015 Métiers d'Art collection. Williams sang the track onscreen with Cara Delevingne.

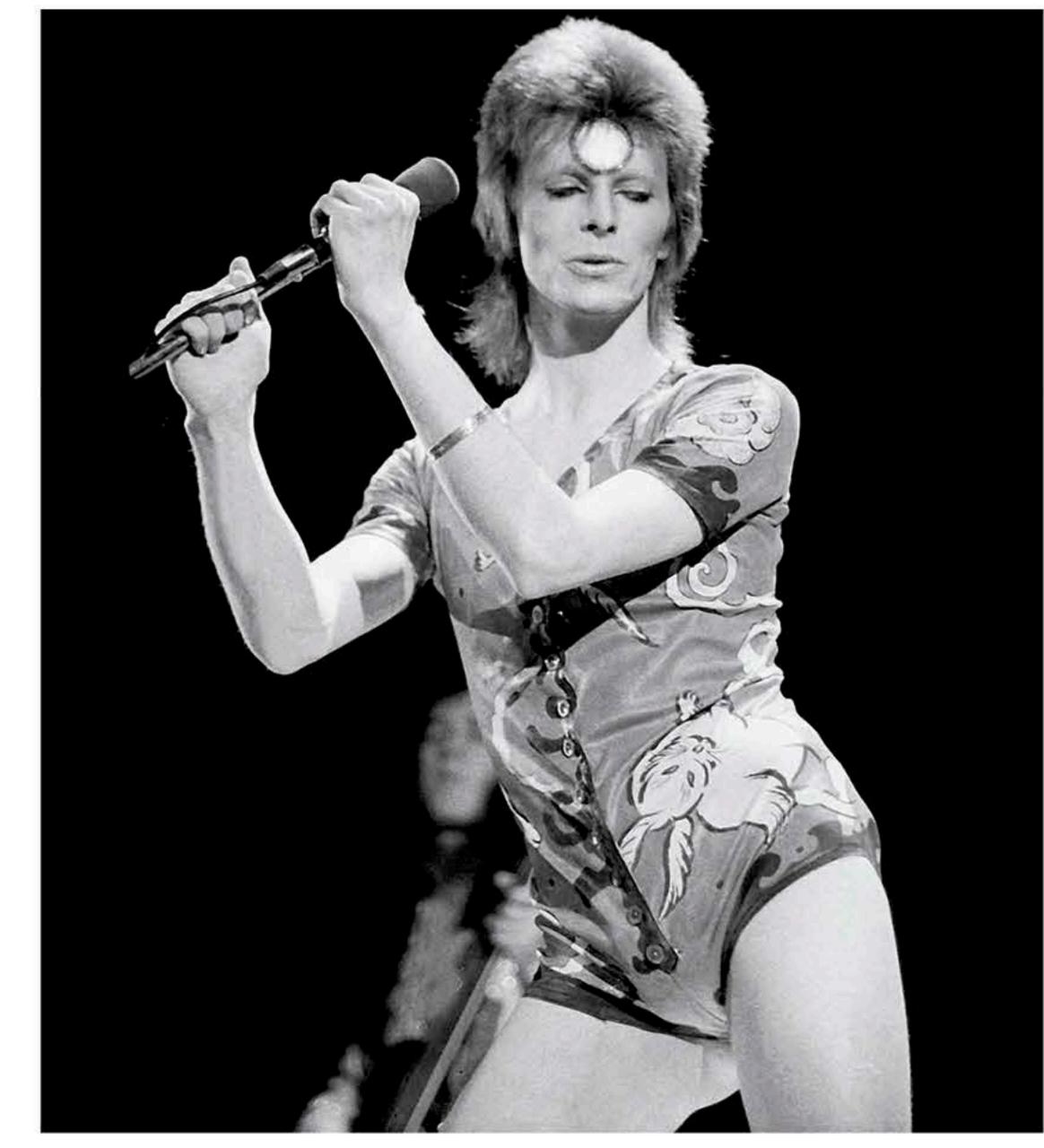
Fashion is a business, and a rapidly evolving one at that. So the fact that pop stars, who Friedman argues are "more relatable and public than valuable actors," can potentially improve a brand's image and expand one's client base is enticing. But the great thing about fashion is that it's a creative business, thus designers' relationships with artists in a different field are not as superficial as, say, Alicia Keys's partnership with BlackBerry.

"When I begin to work with a musician regularly, they often become part of my family," says Givenchy's Riccardo Tisci, who has designed for and built long-lasting relationships with Madonna, Beyoncé, Kanye West, Erykah Badu, and many more. "The relationship is primarily a friendship, and, as such, we inspire each other."

"Sometimes, it's just a project. Other times, it can turn into a real friendship," adds Zucchelli. "Sam [Smith] and I are always sending each other messages from different corners of the world. [But these collaborations] only work if there is real chemistry between the pop star, his tastes and needs, and the clothes. With Sam, it's an effortless process. We usually keep it simple and unfussy, because that is who he is, which also works well with our brand aesthetic."

For stylists and designers alike, the opportunity to craft an image for these megastars is an appealing one. "What I love about musicians and why I work so closely with them is because I love creating a world for them," says designer Jeremy Scott. "I love pushing their persona further." achieved that with Cyrus, for whom he makes custom tour costumes. He even used the singer's psychedelic jewelry in his S/S '15 show.

"I love the size of it. I like the pop-humungous scope," Ottenberg says, explaining the stylist/pop star attraction. "It's like someone giving you the keys to a huge image. And



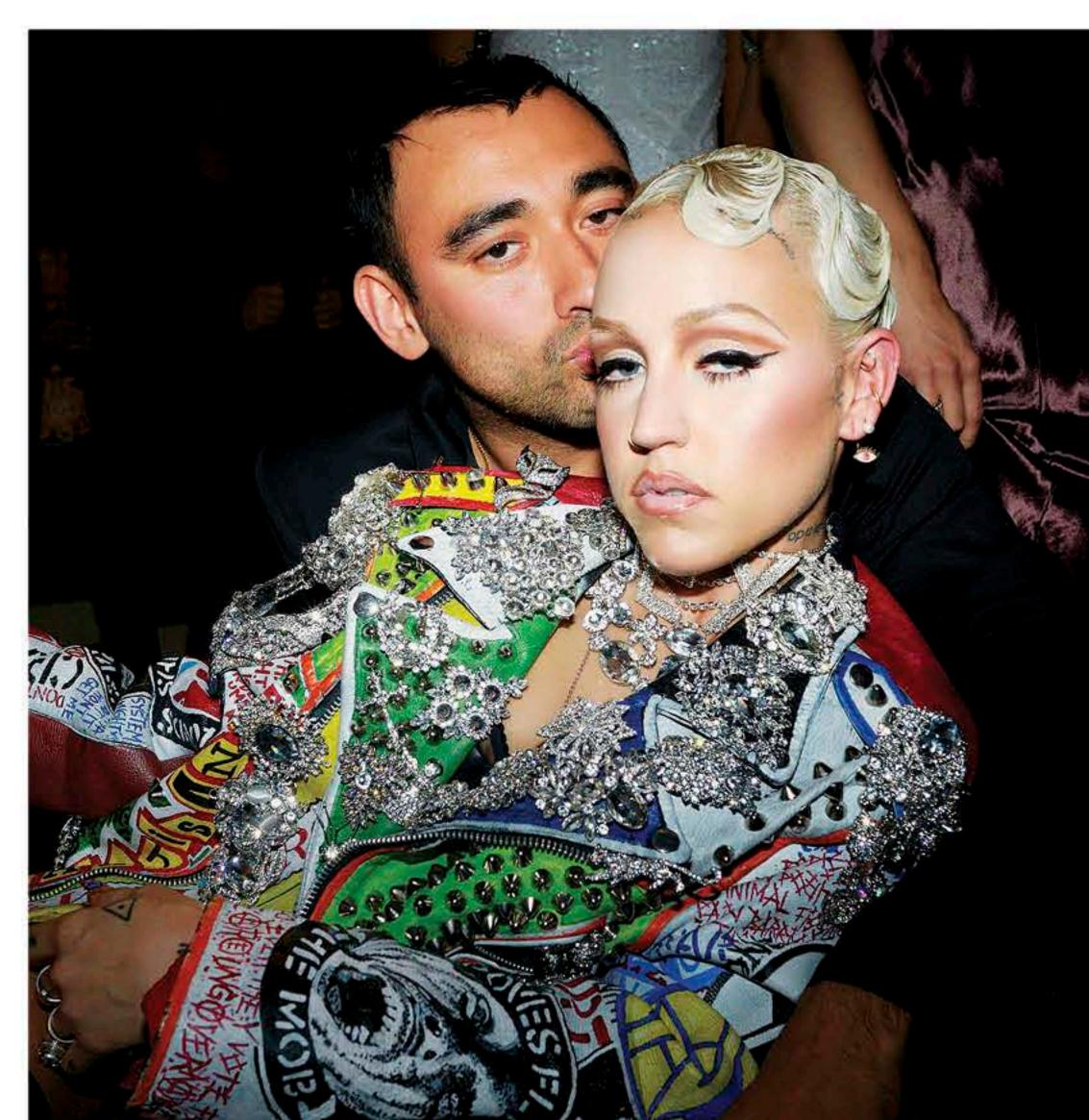
David Bowie in a custom Kansai Yamamoto jumpsuit during his Ziggy Stardust tour in 1973



Madonna in Jean Paul Gaultier's conical bustier during her 1990 Blonde Ambition tour



Grace Jones with Azzedine Alaïa in 1985, in one of his hooded gowns



Nicola Formichetti with his latest pop protégé, Brooke Candy

everyone in the world is going to see it instantly. It's such rush, and it's very inspiring."

It's inspiring for the pop stars, too. Take Cyrus, for instance, who changed her identity from Disney princess to sexed-up punk-pop queen overnight largely through her aesthetic choices. In V83, she discussed the dramatic shift saying, "I'm going to change, I'm going to be different, I'm going to do what I want to do. I chopped my hair and bought a pair of Docs and never looked back." Lady Gaga has said that fashion not only influences her persona, but her songs as well. "Fashion is everything," she told MTV back in 2008. "When I'm writing music, I'm thinking about the clothes I want to wear onstage. It's all about everything altogether - performance art, pop performance art, fashion."

Even so, one has to wonder if, like so many relationships, one party benefits just a little bit more than the other. "The



Calvin Klein's Italo Zucchelli and Sam Smith in New York in October, 2014

relationship is very symbiotic," insists Scott. "I feel like I'm helping [the musicians I dress] do their jobs – helping them be who they're supposed to be." Cavalli concurs that both sides are equal partners. "I think [pop stars] rely on designers to create special looks. And designers rely on pop stars' continuous reinvention for fresh inspiration. Look at the tour costumes I created for Katy Perry! She performed her art using mine. For me, this is the ultimate reward."

Fashion and music's ongoing love affair is an intricate one, but it makes perfect sense. After all, at their best, aren't both mediums a reflection of and commentary on the cultural zeitgeist? "Fashion and music exist because we need them in our lives," muses Versace. "We connect with fashion and music in the same way. They touch something we can't quite explain inside. I don't think one can exist without the other." At the very least, they're better together. KATHARINE K. ZARRELLA