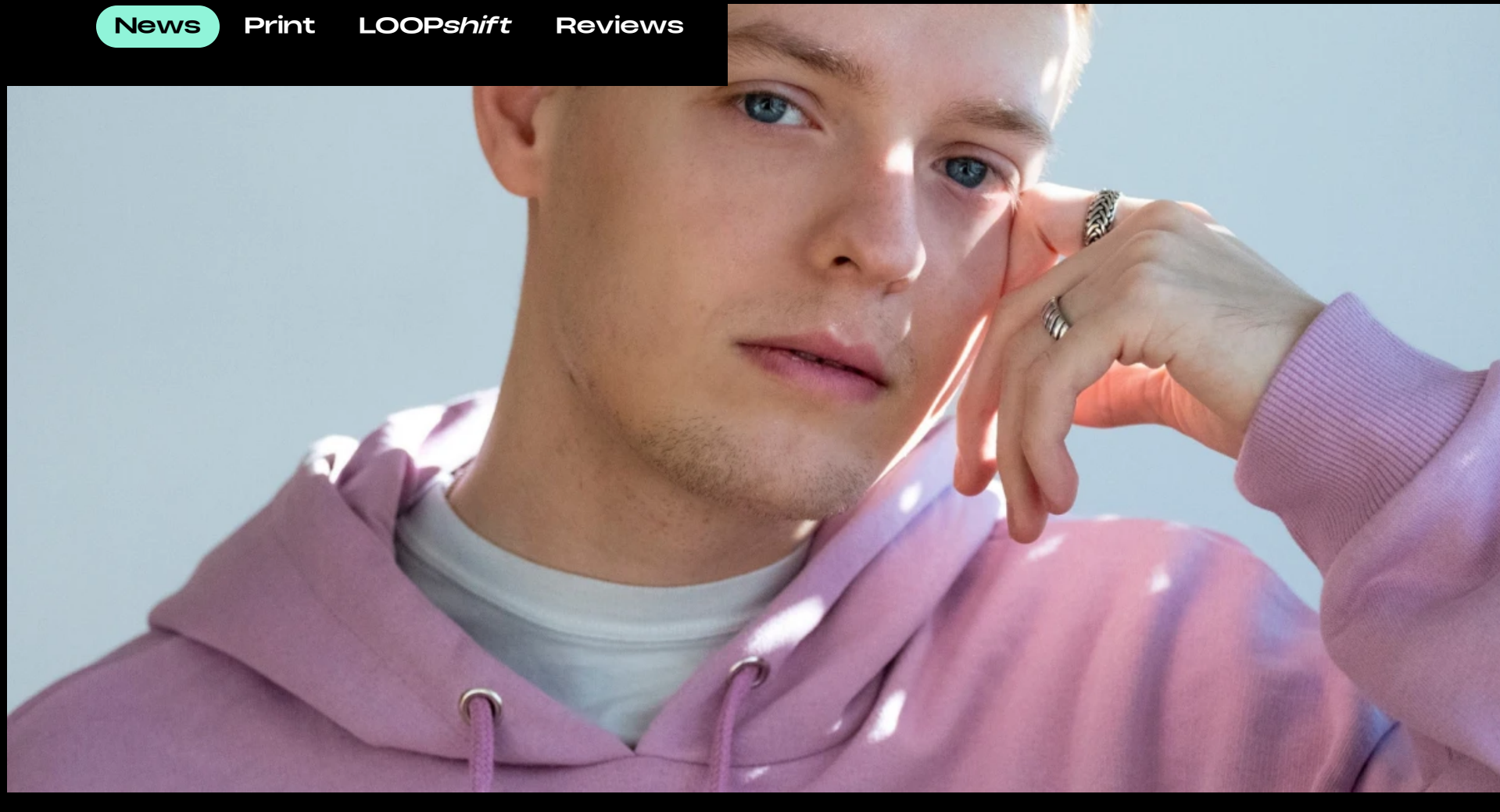




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Ben Dolic sits in his humble Swiss abode on a beautiful sunny Thursday afternoon. He wears a contagious smile and a lilac hoodie patterned with dark-shaded shapes. To his right was an acoustic guitar, his room barren of any other decorations, which filled the room with an air of who Ben was; a humble artist who loved music.

Having featured on Eurovision and The Voice, gracing the stage with the likes of Zara Larson, Rita Ora and a host of other modern household names in the music space –his demeanour did not tell of his grand escapades, instead of a young artist who is happy to lead the simple

life. Do not mistake this for inability or lack of confidence; tracks such as ‘Violent Thing’, bolstering over 12 million streams to date, are a prime example of the young Slovenian’s musical prowess and passion.

Anticipating his first release of 2023 *headspace*, which was due to be distributed across all streaming platforms the very next day (out now on all platforms), we sit down with Ben Dolic to discuss his career so far, his most vulnerable track to date and what’s to come next for creative.

Ben Dolic begins to express the reason for releasing *headspace* as his first track of the year and the struggle with mental health that he touches on in the track, ‘Yeah, I mean, I definitely feel like a lot of stress and anxiety has been released through it. You usually have the songs in the bank for such a long time, and then you prepare them and finalise them; even then, it’s never enough. So, to finally put it out allows my soul to be free of it, it’s in the hands of the people, and I’m just so excited to hear all their reactions and feedback. I’ve always wanted to write something like this. It’s a very, very emotional song being so personal and talking about my struggles, which I’ve never done. It’s a beautiful feeling to be able to share such a track [*headspace*] with the world.’

Taking inspiration from Dominic Fike and Jeremy Zucker, *headspace* is a chill track which pairs vulnerable pop vocals with an increasingly built-up production. The single, co-written and co-produced by Ben Dolic alongside Gethin Williams (who has worked with the likes of Cian Ducrot, Vance Joy etc.), details his struggles with anxiety and developing a regular self-care routine.

Ben takes a moment to fix his hoodie, ponders about the upcoming year and then continues: ‘For some reason, I just always felt this song [*headspace*] would be an excellent opener for the year. I knew the whole year would be connected, emotional, and vulnerable. The track speaks about me having a depressive episode, going through the difficulties of that episode and then realising how bad it is/was. It’s also about giving myself enough time and energy to figure out everything. This is probably the most emotional song I’ve ever written, as I mentioned before. And, as I said, everything else coming out this year will be pretty similar. Before, I was trying many different writing styles and genres – I’ve written love songs and heartbreak songs, which are also connected to your mental health, but not to this depth. I’ve always felt vulnerable as a person. The only part missing was a bit of honesty which I didn’t give my audience much of, whereas this track gives it all.’

Ben has released a handful of tracks ranging in style and genre, from edgy pop anthems with hit single *Violent Thing* to R&B-infusion *Stuck in My Mind*. He does not hesitate to showcase his versatility and pay homage to his inspirations. Dolic’s professionalism does not waver for a single moment. Each track is produced to the utmost quality, with each layer, instrument and word being meticulously crafted to craft songs that truly exhibit his talent to its limits.

Speaking on discovering his own sound, Ben describes the intricate details of his journey, which have led to his distinct style: ‘There is a reason why *Violent Thing* feels so disconnected from the rest of my catalogue, I didn’t write the song. It wasn’t the song I wanted to put out, but it was something I could relate to at the time, and it was offered to me. So, we worked on it together and found the best way to release it, we all knew there was something in it, and it felt great. None of us could anticipate how big it would get nor the number of positive reactions. It’s a banger for sure, and I just love it.’

He takes a moment to revel in the excitement, breathe with a massive grin, and continues, ‘All the songs that followed were my attempt at finding the best way to transition from that song [*Violent Thing*] into what I feel the real me is. *Stuck In My Mind* was still a bit more pop, and then it became more edgy and rocky with *Kissing Her, Missing You*. A more intimate aesthetic shines through with *Breakaway*, and then when you get to *Come By*, it’s a bit confusing because it is R&B leaning. But I guess it’s all inside me; I have different creative sides, and it’s hard to limit where I’m going. So, I can never really say no to something, yet I’m trying to stick to my main thing.’

As he dives into each track, he touches upon the musical influences that have played a part in each song. Growing up watching MTV, he remembers Usher dominating the R&B sphere and how monumental he was to the genre. Jeremy Zucker was another notable name in the mix. Dolic emphasised his fascination with Zucker’s independent production and songwriting style, as the multi-million-selling virtuoso tends to craft it all himself.

Dolic takes a few moments to ponder his career so far, performing in front of millions in major-televised competitions, The Voice and Eurovision, touring across Europe and working alongside industry staples. A blaring smile never leaves his face as he reminisces. Having only started releasing music in 2020, Ben’s trajectory is formidable – a feat that tells his inevitable rise to musical stardom.

‘Well, I’d say my journey started positively. I was signed when we released *Violent Thing* to a sub-label of Universal Germany, and I found it really challenging to get my vision across. I like my vision to be visible in every little detail, from music videos to small details in the artwork. They felt like their vision should be the one projected to the public. That was my first taste of big teams and labels, so it wasn’t good. He says this with not a single ounce of venom, rather understanding the circumstances that surrounded him, ‘Of course, I’d say it’s a lot easier to work alongside a label because you get the support and the financial backing. Yet, we ended up not working together anymore as my vision is one of my most important factors. So ever since the first song, I became independent, it’s just me and my manager doing things all alone. There’s no denying it is a struggle to find the right audience, release strategy and all aspects of being an artist. Making it work by yourself is the hardest thing ever, as there are so many aspects you don’t realise when you are signed. It’s been a bumpy ride. Honestly, it’s been really hard and still is, but I’m seeing a lot of return now. There’s organic growth happening, and that’s the most beautiful thing to see your hard work pay off. I just love it, I love the community, and I would give everything for that community. Honestly, I make an effort to try to be there for them and interact with everybody as they’re literally the heart of what I’m doing.’

From this, we begin discussing his next steps and goals for the forthcoming year; with an upcoming show in London and a roster of tracks set to be released, the future is in sight.

‘I always have a major project in mind, but there’s nothing I can confirm in terms of genre, style, or when it will be released; however, I can definitely promise a lot more releasing this year. We released three songs last year, which is quite a bit already, so we are trying to do even more this year. It’s going to be amazing and a challenge within itself. My focus would be on doing shows as that’s an important thing to me, this year I’ve already done two shows with one scheduled in London next week.’

Ben Dolic’s infectious enthusiasm spreads across the expanses of even our digital barrier as he sets his goals on high. With a solid foundation to build upon, recognised international support and backing and a loyal community, his future is set to be filled with gleaming lights and big stages.

Words by Ramy Abou-Setta
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