

A g e n d a

Culture | People | Politics | Ideas



THE 10 BEST
OTHELLOS
PAGE 6

MUSIC

'From day one, I've always had clothes on'

Midlands MC Lady Leshurr on morals and why the UK needs a female rap star

A few months back, Lady Leshurr turned down a deal with Atlantic Records in the US because she didn't like the way it was pitched. "They said, 'Nicki Minaj is your competition and we will blow her out of the water'," she recalls. The only way to promote female rappers is to pit them against each other, she complains: "It pushes the gaps between us – girl rappers are afraid to work together because we get fixed in these imaginary competitions. The industry just doesn't know what to do with women."

The decision to turn the offer down didn't harm the Birmingham-based Leshurr (Melesha O'Garro), whose name throbs like a belisha beacon in the world of UK grime and beyond. Her new single, *Blazin'*, has gone to No 1 on the MTV Base chart, knocking out Justin Timberlake. She's clutching a pina colada and directing an oversized suitcase in an awkward slalom round the chairs of a Caribbean restaurant in north London. She's just got back from a hip-hop festival in Vietnam, where acts were vetted by the government in advance of their performances for the amount of flesh they were showing. That wasn't a problem for Leshurr – "From day one, I've always had clothes on," she says, and she has her own label, designing the kind of sleek, wetsuitish cuts she favours today.

Born in Solihull to Caribbean

parents (she's now 24), O'Garro started in poetry but turned to music to reach a wider audience, and has guested on tracks by Tinie Tempah and Bashy and performed with Wiley. She credits her success to her YouTube parody of Chris Brown's 2011 song *Look at Me Now*, where she overlaid the original track with perfect mimicry of Busta Rhymes's spitting, replacing all the words to the song, syllable by syllable. The song's gambit, "I don't see how you can hate on a little girl, I look 12 years old", is a gag about her diminutive size, and a message to any UK grime fans who think "doing American beats" is cheap. She provides a window on that world with all its strange internal snobberies. But like London grime artist George the Poet, with whom she shares a bill at the Tate's *Hyperlink* festival in London next weekend, she identifies Eminem as her first and biggest inspiration; then she moved on to Lil Wayne and Ms Dynamite, among many others.

How come there haven't been any UK female rappers as high profile as Dynamite in years, I ask her, despite the fact we're supposed to be in a "golden age" of girl rap? "I don't know," she says, "but I want one so much I don't even care if it's not me."

Interview by Kate Mossman

Hyperlink runs at Tate Modern from 26-28 April 2013



Lady Leshurr photographed in London last week for the Observer by Richard Saker.

ON MY RADAR

Dawn O'Porter's cultural highlights

Journalist and TV presenter Dawn O'Porter grew up in Guernsey, studied acting at the Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts and had her first broadcasting success with a BBC documentary on dieting, *Super Slim Me*, in 2007. A year later she followed this up with programmes about sex, nudity and dating. Other credits include *My Breasts Could Kill Me*, in which she raised awareness of breast cancer. Her debut young adult novel, *Paper Aeroplanes*, is published by Hot Key Books on 2 May.

Gemma Kappala-Ramsamy

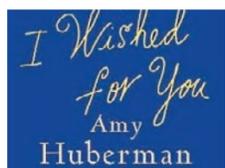


Musical



The Book of Mormon
It's very rare that you go and see a production and from the second it starts to the moment it finishes, it keeps up the level of energy and humour. The perfect piece of musical theatre. The reviews convinced me to see it. Brilliant and funny.

Book



I Wished for You by Amy Huberman
It's packaged as chick lit but it's so much better than that. It starts off with the main character being a bridesmaid at a wedding, and you think, oh, it's another one of those books. But then it launches into a great story. Line-by-line funny.

Pop



Kate Nash: Girl Talk
She had huge success and then she disappeared for a bit, and it was like she'd gone off, lived her life and come back with something really important to say and a different sound. Indie pop isn't usually what I listen to but because I really like Kate I've found myself enjoying her music.

Museum



Life and Death in Pompeii and Herculaneum
Pompeii obsessed me when I was at school. Now the British Museum has brought it to life. You can walk along the pavements, look at artefacts and essentially relive Pompeii. This kind of exhibition makes me proud of the museums we have.

Theatre



Above and Beyond
Look Left Look Right staged this at the Corinthia hotel in London. It was my first experience of immersive theatre. Beforehand, all you know is that you've got to go on your own, and it's really exciting. I got so into my character that I didn't want to leave!

Film



Life of Pi in 3D
Visually spectacular. It blew me away. The story is so lovely – as well as following Pi's life, it's about taking bits from all religions and making them work for you. As a wild-animal lover I also found the making of the film interesting. A feast for the senses – I can't imagine not having watched it in 3D.