



# Reinventing RITA

Singer, fashion icon, actress... and now the new face of DKNY's latest fragrance. Rita Ora on adding yet another string to her bow

WORDS: LIZZIE POOK

---

---

**R**ita Ora has, hands down, one of the loudest voices I have ever heard. “Aaaaaaaaargh,” she booms in a husky London accent as I gingerly position myself on the sofa next to her, trying to hide my alarm. “My god my feet are so sore.” Said feet, I can see, are shackled in a pair of gold gladiator heels that wouldn’t look out of place in the Marquis de Sade’s chamber of torture. And it’s been a long day for the singer. I’m last in a long line of interviews about her collaboration with DKNY for new fragrance, MYNY, for which she was hand-picked by Donna Karan to represent the ‘face’ of New York City (Ora splits her time between NYC and London). Now, having spoken charmingly about patchouli top-notes and the ‘energy’ of a jasmine blend for the best part of a day, Rita and her feet are ready to go home.

It’s no wonder she’s tired; Ora’s elevation to queen of the ‘slashes’ (in this instance singer/fashion icon/actress/model) has been frenetic to say the least. She’s only 23, but in the past two years she has supported Coldplay on tour, performed at Glastonbury, been cast in one of the most talked-about films of the decade – Sam Taylor-Johnson’s *Fifty Shades Of Grey* – and been styled in Chanel by Karl Lagerfeld himself for French magazine *Next*. Prior to that was the year-long Roc Nation ‘training plan’ she was advised to undergo by her mentor, Jay-Z, which saw her relocating to an apartment in Brooklyn, New York and sheltering from the spotlight until the company felt she was ready to be unleashed on the music scene.

The strength of Ora’s (mezzo-soprano) singing voice shouldn’t surprise either. Her voice – which she has referred to as her ‘superpower’ – is her increasingly lucrative cash cow, having featured on tracks with DJ Fresh (2012 drum and bass track *Hot Right Now* catapulted her into the spotlight), Snoop Dogg, Tinie Tempah and Iggy Azalea. It also landed her a number-one debut solo album with 2012’s *Ora* (a second is due out in early 2015) and transformed her from feisty west London teenager to



DESPITE THE CAMOUFLAGE, WE’LL NOTICE IF YOU RUN OFF WITH THE DOG RITA

multi-million single selling recording artist. And the brands are now beckoning, monopolising on Ora’s astonishing ability to sell pretty much anything. As well as the DKNY fragrance, she’s sold her ‘every woman’ image for Marks & Spencer, beanies and bomber jackets for Adidas, nail varnish for Rimmel and eveningwear for Roberto Cavalli. “If Rita can’t sell it, I don’t know who can,” says Donna

imposing almost. She has a dirty laugh and is the type of woman you can imagine getting up to dance on a sticky bar in a European nightclub after one too many Woo Woo pitchers, but managing to look incredibly glamorous while doing so.

## LONDON LOOK

Ora was born in Pristina – in what was then Yugoslavia but is now Kosovo – in 1990 (the

things home, rip them up, figure them out – and then say to everyone, ‘You can’t get this stuff because we *made* it.’ We thought we were so exclusive,” she laughs. Her love for designer labels grew from there. “I became obsessed with punk and Vivienne Westwood. That’s when it all started for me. I’d slot fashion magazines in my school books and get lost in a daydream world. I loved the idea of glamour, of feeling gorgeous and dressing up.”

Rita’s paternal grandfather, Besim, was one of Yugoslavia’s most celebrated film directors, and is responsible for her glamorous first name (inspired by Rita Hayworth). Her father, however, is the one who changed her original family name from Sahatçiu, meaning ‘watchmaker’, to Ora, meaning ‘hour’; if his daughter was to be famous, he wanted her to have a surname people could pronounce. Around the same time (when Rita was 11), Ora attended the Sylvia Young Theatre School, then after dropping out of school at 16, working in a trainer shop and singing in bars, three

## “I’D PUT FASHION MAGAZINES IN MY SCHOOL BOOKS AND GET LOST IN A DAYDREAM”

Karan of the singer. “She’s full of life, she’s about what everyone wants to feel – energy. And I find her ageless. She’s like this Energizer Bunny who can wear anything from track shoes to stilettos. I love the girl as a person, too. She walks the talk.”

In person Ora is incredibly beautiful – with cartoonish saucer eyes, heavy arched eyebrows (bleached blonde today) and endlessly long limbs (she is surprisingly tall). Her presence is powerful too,

president of Kosovo. Atifete Jahjaga, has already invited the Oras to dinner to toast her success). She left for London as a baby with her mother Vera, a psychiatrist, father Besnik, a business owner, and older sister, Elena, and grew up in London’s Notting Hill. “My whole fascination with fashion came from London,” she says, recalling how she and her friend Kyle De’volle, now her stylist, used to rummage through the £2 bins in Portobello Market. “We’d take

years later she auditioned to be the British contestant for the 2009 Eurovision Song Contest on reality show *Eurovision: Your Country Needs You*. Ora later withdrew on the advice of Sarah Stennett, who became her manager and put her in touch with Roc Nation and Mr Shawn Carter himself. After being signed that same year, she would go on to be the label's first act to have a number-one album in the UK.

COUTURE QUEEN

Now, Ora is known as much for her bold fashion choices as she is for her music. "I've always wanted to make an impact visually, it's another way of identifying yourself," she says, citing Madonna, Freddie Mercury, Bob Marley and Marilyn Monroe as inspirations. "In this industry there are so many artists, you have to embrace what makes you different."

For Ora, that could be anything from a SpongeBob SquarePants Moschino mini-dress to a lime green animal-print velour tracksuit, or platinum-blond curls to neon cornrows. Dressing up for her is part charade, part theatre. She may have a (wonderful) tendency to look somewhat like a supersized Manga character but there's no denying her willingness to take risks and inject an element of fun into everything she wears. So is anything off limits? "Nope," she grins. "I know people will think, 'Yeah right,' but there really isn't. I'm up for trying everything. My parents were great at bringing me up. They gave me morals but they never trapped me. Yeah, they might have thought I was a bit crazy with what I wore and what I did, but they were supportive and that made me really confident. I always just remind myself that whatever you choose to wear, at the end of the day, you're not offending anybody." I'm intrigued to know what she considers to be her biggest fashion fail. "I went through a massive tomboy phase," she says. "I was the goalie in my football team at school, and so I decided to wear trainers everywhere with my trousers hanging down and big baggy T-shirts. I was never the most

girly girl." She relies on her mum to tell her when something is a little too outrageous. "My mum may not know what's new this season, but she's got a great eye. And she knows what looks good on me. She has always been the first to say, 'No, that's really not working.' The other day I wore this Moschino look; full mesh outfit, loads of gold chains, a massive gold belt and a gold choker – just way over the top. She just looked at me and was like, 'I just don't understand'".

So is confidence the key to getting away with some of her more left-field ensembles? "Confidence, a smile and being comfortable in your skin," she says. "It's not about trying to impress anybody. As long as you're owning what you stand for, that's all that matters. People really do notice when you've got your sh\*t together. It's simple."

Next up, Ora will portray Christian Grey's adopted sister, Mia, in *Fifty Shades Of Grey* (out February 2015). She originally hoped to perform on the soundtrack but Taylor-Johnson encouraged her to audition instead. This is typical of Ora: the ultimate career chameleon who embraces every opportunity, who is not afraid to take risks and who welcomes anything the merciless music industry throws at her – tabloid gossip, social media feuds, ex-boyfriends who pointedly announce their break ups on Twitter – with good grace and a calm demeanour. She has single-handedly moulded herself into a saleable brand; a miniature empire almost. And that's what remains impressive about Ora. She may have forged a career out of good looks and a strong voice, but she's maintained it with a hell of a lot of business nous (recent reports place her net worth well into the millions). So what is there still left to conquer? "I'd love to do a tour – to travel the world with my band and my dancers – I'd love to do a soundtrack, do movies, write a script," she says wistfully. "But first, I'm taking these off. I need a break," she says gleefully, gesturing to her feet. About time, too.

**DKNY MYNY fragrance is available at Debenhams nationwide**

RITA'S FASHION MOMENTS

The looks even Rita's mum would approve of



VIVIENNE WESTWOOD A/W 2012 SHOW, LONDON FASHION WEEK



IN STELLA McCARTNEY AT THE 2012 BRITISH FASHION AWARDS



ARRIVING AT BURBERRY PRORSUM, LONDON FASHION WEEK A/W 2013



MODELLING MOSCHINO AT MILAN FASHION WEEK A/W 2014



IN ROBERTO CAVALLI TO CELEBRATE ITALIAN FASHION AT THE V&A IN APRIL



AT THE MET GALA IN DONNA KARAN ATELIER IN MAY 2014



LOVING HER MYNY FRAGRANCE FOR THE NEW DKNY CAMPAIGN