



## ZELLA DAY ON APACHE INFLUENCES AND PERFORMING AT COACHELLA – EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

APRIL 21, 2016 by INDIRA CESARINE

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*Zella Day photographed by Indira Cesarine for The Untitled Magazine. Zella wears a metallic dress by LIKA with rings and collar necklace by MI/MI.*

At only age 21, Arizona beauty **Zella Day** may seem young but her music reveals an artist wise beyond her years. The singer-songwriter has been playing guitar and performing since the age of 9 and independently recorded and released her first album, *Powered By Love*, at 14. You may remember her from last year's hit single "**Hypnotic**." The pulsing anthem to dangerous relationships blew up the airwaves and confirmed that Zella Day is one to watch. While the sensual single (and accompanying desert fantasy music video) cemented her status as a rising pop-star, it was her 2015 major label debut album, *Kicker*, that proved her wide-ranging musical abilities with its showcase of electric guitar, acoustic melodies, and tambourine. Since releasing the "psychedelic, Western pop" album the singer-songwriter has stayed busy with appearances on taste-making shows such as *Late Night with Seth Meyers* and *Last Call with Carson Daly*.

For Zella, work doesn't stop after the talk show circuit, since the release of *Kicker* she has toured extensively, generating critical acclaim for high energy performances at festivals such as Lollapalooza, iHeartRadio, and Billboard Hot 100. This month, the fashion forward rocker played her biggest show yet at [Coachella](#). Read our full interview with Zella Day below and don't miss her next performance at Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival on April 23rd!



wears a sequined jumpsuit by THE BLONDS.

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Indira Cesarine: Could you tell me about growing up in Arizona and your first forays in music?

Zella Day: I grew up in a town of 7,000 people. The town was called Pinetop and it's a small town in Arizona near the Apache Reservation and the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest. My grandmother and mother owned and ran a coffee shop called Mor Mor Coffee, and that's how I got my start playing music. They had the only stage in town for live music and I played there every Friday with the local musicians in town. There wasn't much of a music scene and so luckily, I got to be a part of the small one that was there.

ID: How old were you when you started getting into music?

ZD: I was 9 years old when I picked up a guitar. I was 12 when I started taking lessons in theory, so I started learning the mechanics and mathematics behind songwriting and what it was to write a song. By the time I was 14 years old I recorded an independent record called *Powered by Love*.

IC: Wow, that's amazing at 14! That's really young to do your first album.

ZD: I was dedicated and I've always known what I wanted to do and luckily, my family was supportive of this dream of mine and this vision from a very young age.



IC: What musical influences do you feel like have had the most impact on your work and your sound?

ZD: As you know, growing up, your musical tastes vary and change drastically. Some don't change at all. I've gone through phases of listening to completely different kinds of music. When I was writing for the first time, I was listening to a lot of **The Beatles** and **Bob Dylan**. I was also listening to artists like Jack Johnson and G. Love & Special Sauce. A lot of Brushfire Records artists were inspiring to me since I was playing coffee shops and I was solely acoustic. When I moved out to California, I was influenced by a lot of local music, people that I was working with and producers who were working with great artists. I started listening to my peers, including **Garrett Borns** and **Local Natives**. I really got into the Father John Misty record. Not that Father John is necessarily my peer, but I definitely started listening to a lot of California based music as I was writing my record.

IC: Do you feel like growing up in Arizona near an American Indian reservation influenced your work at all? "Hypnotic" and some of your other songs almost sound like they could be inspired by that.

ZD: The name of my whole record, *Kicker*, is named after the Apache man that worked on the ranch with my dad. When I was growing up, I was about 5 or 6, I would walk down to the barn everyday, because at the time my family was living on the ranch that my dad was developing. Kicker worked in the barn and was in charge of the 50-horse operation. I would walk down there everyday and sit on a bale of hay and ask Kicker to tell me stories and he did. He divulged all of the beautiful, mythological folklore and stories. A lot of his culture went into my young brain. It was the first time I remember being sparked by creativity and also the first time I remember having very vivid dreams. My record is named after him. So yes, the native culture really did have an impact on me as a person and as an artist.



Both pages:  
Zella wears a top by  
GEORGINE, trousers  
by BREELAYNE,  
rings by MI/MI.

Zella

wears a top by GEORGINE, trousers by BREELAYNE and rings by MI/MI.

IC: What other influences have inspired your songwriting?

ZD: A lot of 60's and 70's female artists have inspired me. I went through a phase of listening to only **Patti Smith**, Carole King, and **Stevie Nicks**. **Joni Mitchell** was huge for me as well, and **Janis Joplin**. Those 5 really influenced me. When I started performing I watched videos of those women on stage. I really studied their song writing and researched what their voices were like on and off stage and how they carried themselves as women amongst men. As we all know, the majority of the industry is run by men and it's hard to be a woman with a strong voice. There are women who have done it really well and those women, in particular, have really inspired me.

IC: It's a great selection. I can see their influence in your stylistic direction.

ZD: Thank you. That means a lot to me.

IC: What song that you've recorded so far do you find personally resonates the most?

ZD: Off of my record, the song that resonates the most is "**Jameson**." I got to record that song in the way that I've always recorded songs; just in the room, me and my guitar, nothing but an instrument and a voice. I also feel lyrically that song really displays my strengths as a songwriter. So that song really resonates with me and also resonates with people of all ages. I have dads come up to me after shows and tell me how much it touched them, how happy they are that they are sober dads, and how drinking was really ruining their family. Now that they don't drink anymore they say, "Thank you for the song." It really touched them. I also have young girls come up to me and say, "Oh, I have a boyfriend named Jameson and the song is the anthem to our relationship." In that song, there's something for everybody. It's hard to write a song like that but, I think that I see that thing in "Jameson".

IC: What was the inspiration behind your track "**Hypnotic**", I know the video got a lot attention!

ZD: "Hypnotic" is about the loss of power through physicality in a new relationship. When I moved to California, I was really testing the waters with partying and men and being in a city for the first time. I was exposed to a whole new group of people and was really figuring out how to feel powerful. It was really hard to feel powerful being physical with somebody that you're not in a relationship with. "Hypnotic" is about that feeling, about how no matter how hard you try, you can't really win with sex. It doesn't work.

IC: Being from a small town in Arizona, did you find it really challenging to throw yourself into the waters of Los Angeles? How did that move affect you personally?

ZD: I moved to Long Beach first because we have family there. My sister, my mom, and I moved into a little apartment on the beach and I started working at a restaurant. I started hanging out with a lot of girls who worked at that restaurant with me so, I had a slow introduction into the faster life. Even the pace of Long Beach was night and day compared to Pinetop. Two years into that, I moved to Los Angeles and that's when everything changed for me. I was around more music, more art, more young people doing what I'm doing. It really sparked this new era in my life of excitement and competitiveness and creativity that I've never experienced before. Moving to LA was perfect for writing my record but, I also dealt with those small town girl kind of things. I missed the smell of rain and I missed being able to go run around my yard in just my bra and underwear and lay in the sun because I had no neighbors. It's a completely different form of life here but, for what I'm doing right now, it's perfect. I do know that eventually, when I'm ready, I will retreat back to the mountains.



*Zella wears a sequined jumpsuit by THE BLONDS.*

IC: I know that you have a huge performance coming up at **Coachella**, have you ever played a festival as big as Coachella before?

ZD: I like to think that Lollapalooza is probably comparable to Coachella. Although, I do feel like Coachella is a little bit more fashion driven. When you mix music and fashion that heavily, it's a completely different animal. So I think the type of audience that I will be reaching for at Coachella, I have not yet reached. As far as people standing in the crowd, yes, I have played for that many people.

IC: Do you have anything you can share about your forthcoming performance? What are you excited about?

ZD: I'm going to be doing some special things visually. I don't want to give anything away because this performance is really important. It's a badge of honor. When they give you this slot at Coachella, they're looking at you like, "Here you go. We just handed you the audience of the world pretty much on a silver platter." You have this opportunity to take advantage of that or you're lazy and don't get anything from it. I am going to be playing a new song and I'm going to be featuring an artist. I can't say who, but I'm going to have another artist on stage to sing one of my songs with me. I'm designing outfits right now for the stage and planning all of the cool little things that go into my preparation.

IC: What is the most challenging experience you've had so far in your career path?

ZD: Hmm, the most challenging experience I've had is believing in myself and keeping that a constant. There's a lot of people that you meet in this industry, there's a lot of shows that you play, there's a lot of songs that you write and if I know anything, it's that believing is contagious. If you're not confident and you don't believe in yourself, people feel that. I've had to really learn to keep my head up and not get too afraid when things aren't working out in the present moment because I know a bigger picture. I'm going to be playing music for the rest of my life and that's not a problem and it doesn't scare me. Fear is the enemy because in the industry, people



can sense it. I've kind of let that take over from time to time but I've figured out how to push through and believe in my own bigger picture.



Both pages:  
Zella wears rings and a  
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Zella wears

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IC: How would you describe your music to someone who has never heard it before?

ZD: I would say, psychedelic, Western pop... It's hard to describe the record because it is such a combination of things. I'm playing an acoustic guitar in some songs, I'm playing the electric guitar, and in some songs I'm just playing a tambourine. *Kicker* is really an experiment of my abilities. I took everything I loved and put it into one record. There's not just one direction.

IC: How many different instruments do you play?

ZD: Just one, I play guitar. I don't know if you count tambourine as an instrument.

IC: It's definitely an instrument!

ZD: I play tambourine on stage too.

IC: So what do you have on the radar after Coachella that we can look forward to?

ZD: A headlining tour and a joint tour with Michael Franti. I'm really looking forward to some of the dates that I'm playing with Michael Franti. We are playing Red Rocks Amphitheatre in Colorado. That is a venue that I have been gunning for and that I've had my sights set on for years. I think it's one of the best ones in the country! I'm also touring through Flagstaff, Arizona, which is really close to my hometown. I'm excited that I'll

have a lot of familiar faces at that show. I'm going to play Oregon again, Mammoth in California, and a lot of territories that I haven't hit yet. So, I'm excited for that.

IC: Do you have any New York dates set yet?

ZD: For my own personal, headlining shows, we are doing some east coast routing. Nothing on the books yet that I can tell you, but I'm definitely going to be playing there within the next 3-4 months.

IC: Is it going to be a predominantly American tour, or are you going to go to Europe with it?

ZD: Predominantly American right now. I went to Europe last year for a full month and I wouldn't be surprised if I went there at the end of the year again.

IC: Great, I can't wait to check it all out. Congratulations on Coachella! Do you know what you're going to wear for the performances?

ZD: I'm designing pieces. I have a couple of girlfriends who have a clothing line called Union and Hyde, and they were actually over here last night. We were sketching and taking my measurements. I get to wear whatever is in my brain which is such a luxury! I have really special people in my life that I love to work with. That's the beautiful part about living in a city like LA where I'm surrounded by creative people. It really does help my cause. It's amazing. I could never achieve the kind of things I'm achieving now in Pinetop, Arizona. It would never work.

IC: Last little question, do you have any words of wisdom that you live by?

ZD: Right now, I have a little mantra. Before I get on stage I get the boys together and we do a little toast to playing music. At the end of the day, we're so lucky that we get to do that. The words I always speak are from a song by The National and the words are: "I am good and I am grounded." Those words kind of root me into my life and how lucky I am. Every time I get onstage it's a blessing and a gift that people want to listen to me and that people put me there. At the end of the day, it's not just me. I need everybody else as well.

*Interview, photography and styling by Indira Cesarine for The Untitled Magazine*

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