

THE
BEAUTIFUL
SOUNDS OF
SOPHIE
AUSTER

Photography ANNE HOJLUND NICOLAISEN
Styling HISSA IGARASHI



Dress SAINT LAURENT



Dress BLU MARINE.
Jacket MAX MARA.
Shoes GIUSEPPE ZANOTTI.

By JASON GREENSPAN

Sophie Auster is a true quadruple threat. An immensely talented singer, actress, writer and model, she's been conquering artistic mediums since she can remember. Auster developed a passion for performance at an early age, embracing the influence of her writer parents and winning a national poetry contest at 12 years old. She grew up surrounded by classic literature and her parents' appreciation for the arts, but her style is very much her own.

Music has always been a tremendous part of Sophie's life; she released her self-titled debut album on French label Naïve at only 18 years old. The project was a musical interpretation of some of her favorite poetry, garnering widespread critical acclaim and allowing her to tour the world while on breaks from Sarah Lawrence College. She confesses that it was a manic period and intensely stressful at times, but that her enthusiasm for the music pulled her through.

Her sound is smoky and intense, rich with flecks of blues, jazz, rock and even folk. And as you might expect, her lyrics are deeply meaningful and sans cheap appeal; she's brought her penchant for poetry into her original work. The Red Weather EP showcased her powerful writing ability, and now she's ready to take things a step further with the release of her LP, Dogs and Men, out June 9th.

Twelve sat down with Sophie mid-photoshoot to chat with her about life, her many talents, and the dubious title of her forthcoming LP. Read the full interview below.

So let's start with your music. You were 18 and in college when you released self-titled, touring the world on your breaks. What was that like?

I was mostly in Europe, and I did some touring in South America; it was all really exciting. But it was also very hard to balance everything. I had just entered Sarah Lawrence as a freshman and it all definitely caught up with me. I suffered academically that semester and ended up taking a year off so that I could focus on the opportunities that were coming to me. And then I realized that I was missing out on a college experience, and that graduating was important to me, so I went back and put music on hold for a little while.

The fact that you were willing to put so much work into music while still attending school shows how passionate you are about your art. When did you know that this was something that you wanted to go all the way with?

I knew from a very early age that I wanted to be doing something performance-based. I was acting and doing all these things but I didn't really know what I wanted to focus on for a while. So once I recorded self-titled when I was 16, I realized how much I liked doing that, but I also realized how much I wanted to put my own work out. That takes a long time, to find your creative voice. I did a lot of really small performances around the city and played with different musicians to try and figure out who I was as a musician.

What did you think when you first read a script for American Horror And that really is a very interesting concept, taking the works of poetry greats and converting them to a musical form. It's also fairly deep for someone as young as you were at the time. Where did your interest in that come from?

My parents are writers and I grew up surrounded by literature. I was reading a lot of poetry when I was young, and my mom gave me a book of Emily Dickinson poetry. And actually, I won a national poetry contest when I was 12, so it was kind of in me. I still read a lot of poetry before I write lyrics, because it's easy to get stuck in clichés when your writing songs. There are a lot

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of things that come automatically to humans like “My baby left me,” (laughs), and this kind of stuff. And yea that works and rolls off of the tongue, but I want to push myself to be cleverer.

So you're also an accomplished actor. Do you find any intersects between the two crafts? Or do you attack them very differently?

With both of them, and with any other art form, I just have to be extremely relaxed for it to go well. So I think they're very similar; whether it's releasing a song, or acting in a scene where something tragic is happening, you really have to let go. For me, the most electric feeling comes from performing music. The reason that I've somewhat stepped away from acting is that I really like being the director of my own work, and I realized that I have very little control as an actress in someone else's film.

So, moving on to your Red Weather EP, the collection has this smooth, smoky, bluesy aesthetic. Where did your interest in that sound come from?

I always said that I wanted to be the female Tom Waits, and I was heavily influenced by a lot of his production and the sounds on his records. And then of course there was the music that I grew up listening to: a lot of torch singers and jazz. I listened to a lot of Peggy Lee, Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holliday and Nina Simone. Those singers really got into my being, so I feel there's a lot of that essence in there.

So while we're on the subject of your style and your writing, talk to me about your process; for example, do you lock yourself in a dark room with a pen and paper? Or do you sit down with a guitar?

I do write on guitar, but sometimes I'll start with a melody. And sometimes lyrics pretty much write the melody themselves. But I have a very sunny apartment; I don't like to write in the dark (laughs). I do need a lot of quiet, though. My poor boyfriend is constantly getting kicked out. I make a lot of weird sounds when I'm writing; I'm testing things out with my voice and a lot of the time if I'm stuck or something, I'll just let go and freestyle. I don't want someone listening to that; it's embarrassing!



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So let's talk about the upcoming LP. It's called Dogs and Men. Should I be offended?

No! (laughs) It's not “Men are Dogs” or anything like that. It's obviously slightly humorous, and people have been reacting to it, but it really is about the split subject matter of the record. There's a side that has a lot of animal imagery and a lot of dreamy things going on, and then the rest is really about relationships. It's a bit of a bold title, but I like to be bold or go home.

How do you think you/your music has changed since the Red Weather EP?

I was a lot freer on this record. I produced Red Weather myself, which was very difficult, and not something that I really want to do again. I was pulling my hair out trying to articulate what I wanted in the studio. I look back at it and I feel very proud, but it was tough. And now, I'm collaborating with Jarred Samuel, who plays keys in my band, and he produced this new record with me. It was so great to have someone else's help with that and to have someone to bounce ideas off of. I really love this record; it's bolder and exhibits a freedom that I haven't had before. There was a point when I was in the studio and was so worried about nailing every take and having it be perfect the first time, and at this point I'm like “fuck it I'm throwing everything against the wall to see what happens.” I really trust myself these days.

If you can narrow it down, give me one film idol and one music idol of yours.
In music, let's do Nina Simone. And in film...let's see...Jeanne Moreau.

So do you have any upcoming shows that you'd like to make your fans aware of?

Yes! I'm doing a VH1 Save The Music Foundation event at Pianos NYC on September 30th at 11pm. Everyone should come!

Check out Sophie's sounds at www.sophiaustermusic.com, and be sure to grab tickets to her album release show at www.publictheater.org.



*This page: Top, Short Pants VALENTINO.
Jacket A.E. VANDEVORST.
Shoes YIGAL AZROUEL.
Left page: Dress BLUMARINE.*



*This page: Top, Skirt A.F. VANDEVORST.
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