



Claims Department ~ La Roux

February, 2023 ~ johnnyeponymous@gmail.com

I have written about the days of the massive infection that took hold on the back of my head, to these any years ago. A week at home, feverish, hurting, unable to sleep, brought me to *Community* and saw me publish and write more and more and more. There was another discovery that week, and one that has had a lasting effect.

Behind my apartment, my tiny 0 bedroom apartment, was a house with a large Mexican family living in it. They were very nice, but they liked to have parties. Big parties. So, there I was, in bed, half-hallucinating, eating only what little I could make with the random stuff I had around my little place. That night, about 9pm, the music started.

Loud music.

They started with Banda music, which I can get into given the right mood, and there was some Selina and Celia Cruz mixed in. I didn't mind much, I just put on my headphones and listened to the five episodes of *Community* that were available on Hulu at the time while reading *The Bones of Time*. After a couple of hours, that music stopped, and I noticed and took off my headphones, went to the bathroom, and just as I was coming back, a new song blasted on. It wasn't Spanish. It wasn't Banda. It was technopop.

The song was *Bulletproof*, and I would later find out that the performer was La Roux.

This was what started a new era in my music listening.

I've always liked synthpop, but this was different. It was a complete embrace for the synthpop style, but there was a lot more intensity to the lyrics and vocals.

*Been there, done that, messed around
I'm having fun, don't put me down
I'll never let you sweep me off my feet*

Those are the opening lyrics of *Bulletproof*, It's very telling to what La Roux has always held as an ethos. The group at the time was a duo - Elly Jackson, the primary singer and producer Ben Langmaid. Elly quickly became known for her unique style, largely androgynous and with a busy, 1980s-vibe to it. As much as their absolutely hammerin' sound, it was her aesthetic that helped establish La Roux as a serious force.

La Roux, the first album from the band, was an absolute banger of a record, but more importantly, it was a massive commercial success. It won a Grammy, got massive radio play, and sold a bunch. It was 2009 and things were different then.

The pair were also having issues.

Having a duo is always a hard thing. Look at Simon & Garfunkel for a good example. She was the face of the act, and he was the producer. When they started, they were very much a folk act, and they called themselves AUTOMAN. After a while, they went electronic and changed the name of the act, and Jackson, to La Roux. Apparently, this is a combination of French terms for Redhead to sorta play off of Elly's semi-genderbenderism.

Which is an interesting point. She's tomboyish, but she's also embraced her femininity at times, though not overtly. For years, she wasn't at all forthcoming with details of her sexuality, and was uncomfortable with that sort of openness, though in 2020, she came out, which is completely understandable as she had become very established as an act and didn't have to worry about the effect on her sales.

Partly because they had kinda tanked.

This is the story of a band whose sound is so distinct, but have difficulties with their management, their label, and themselves. Langmaid left La Roux in 2012, and the follow-up album came out in 2014. It was full of material the pair had been working on plus other newer stuff, so it was the last stamp Langmaid had on the act La Roux.

Jackson took the name La Roux as her performer name, and with it being the name of the act, that would make a lot of sense as people thought that was her name, in much the same way that folks think CeLo Green is Gnarl Barkley... or at least they did for a long time.



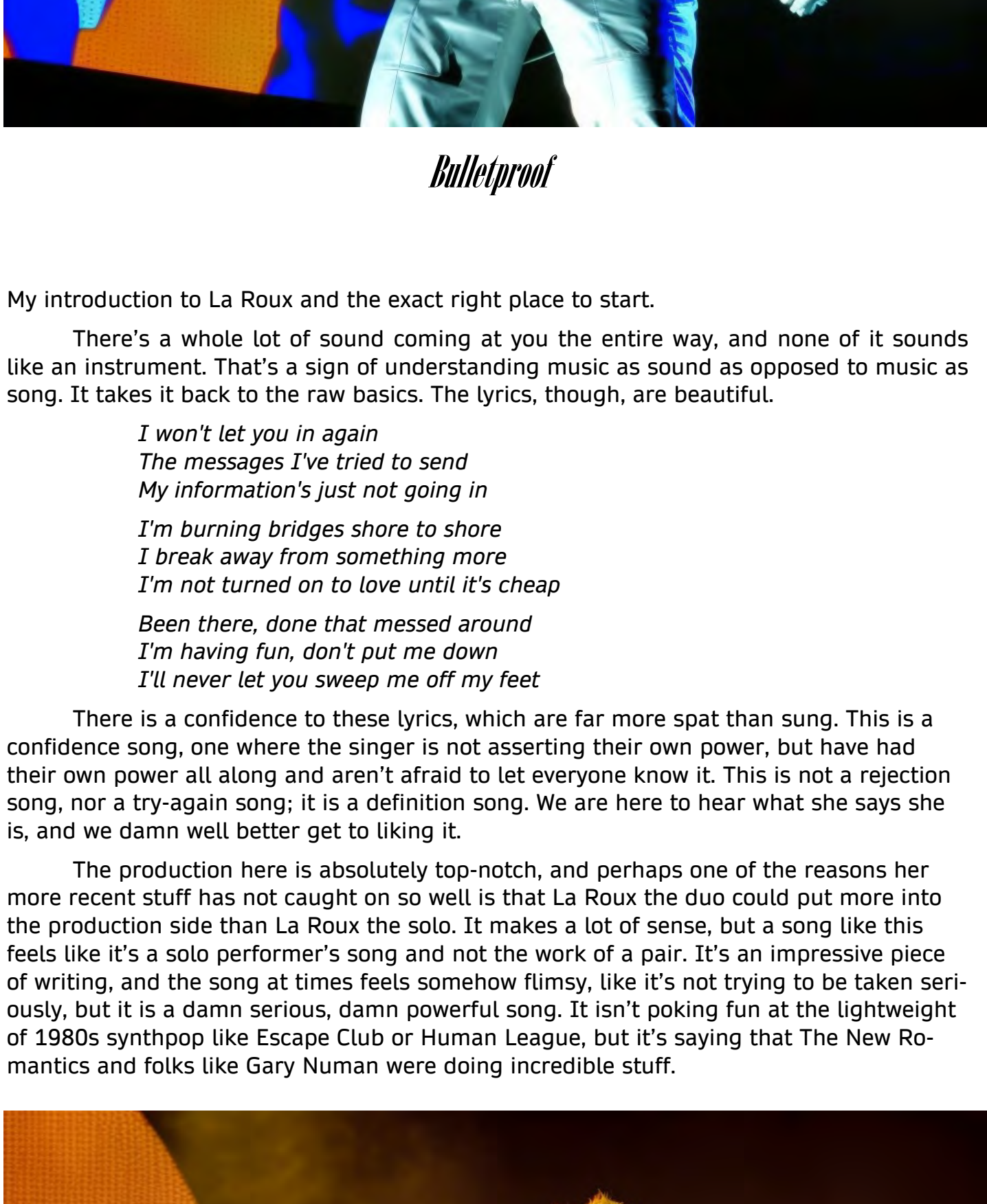
The second album did not do well. There were issues with the label, and she toured all over the place for years. The album did well with critics, but not in sales. There are really good songs on it, including one of my favorites, *Up-tight Downtown*, which was written about the 2011 London Riots and is just a damn good tune.

Polydor wasn't happy with the sales, and they cut ties. That can be death to a musical act, but La Roux still toured all over the place, and usually got get notices. That's where a lot of the money for the mid-name bands of the 21st century can be found.

LA Roux released an album in 2020. *Supervision* was a great record. Honestly, it was one of the best of 2018. The songs *21st Century* and *International Woman of Leisure* are both among the best La Roux has ever put out, and they're both the kinds of songs that they'd been doing back in the *Bulletproof* time frame. In fact, I had to look it up because I completely thought *21st Century* had been out on the first album. Great stuff!

The thing is, La Roux's third album was self-released. Jackson founded Supercolor records as her own label. There was gonna be a big ol' tour, but then COVID hit and it was off. The album did OK, but nothing special. The songs were great, though, and shows that working on her own, Elly Jackson is a really solid performer/producer combo. There aren't a whole bunch of those these days in the marketplace, though it's never been easier to do and on the smaller side of things, there are plenty of folks doing just that. This album was all Elly's, and it was really good.

So, this issue will be looking at the songs *Bulletproof* and *International Woman of Leisure*, and the music videos for *I'm Not Your Toy*, *Bulletproof*, and *Going in for the Kill*.



Bulletproof

My introduction to La Roux and the exact right place to start.

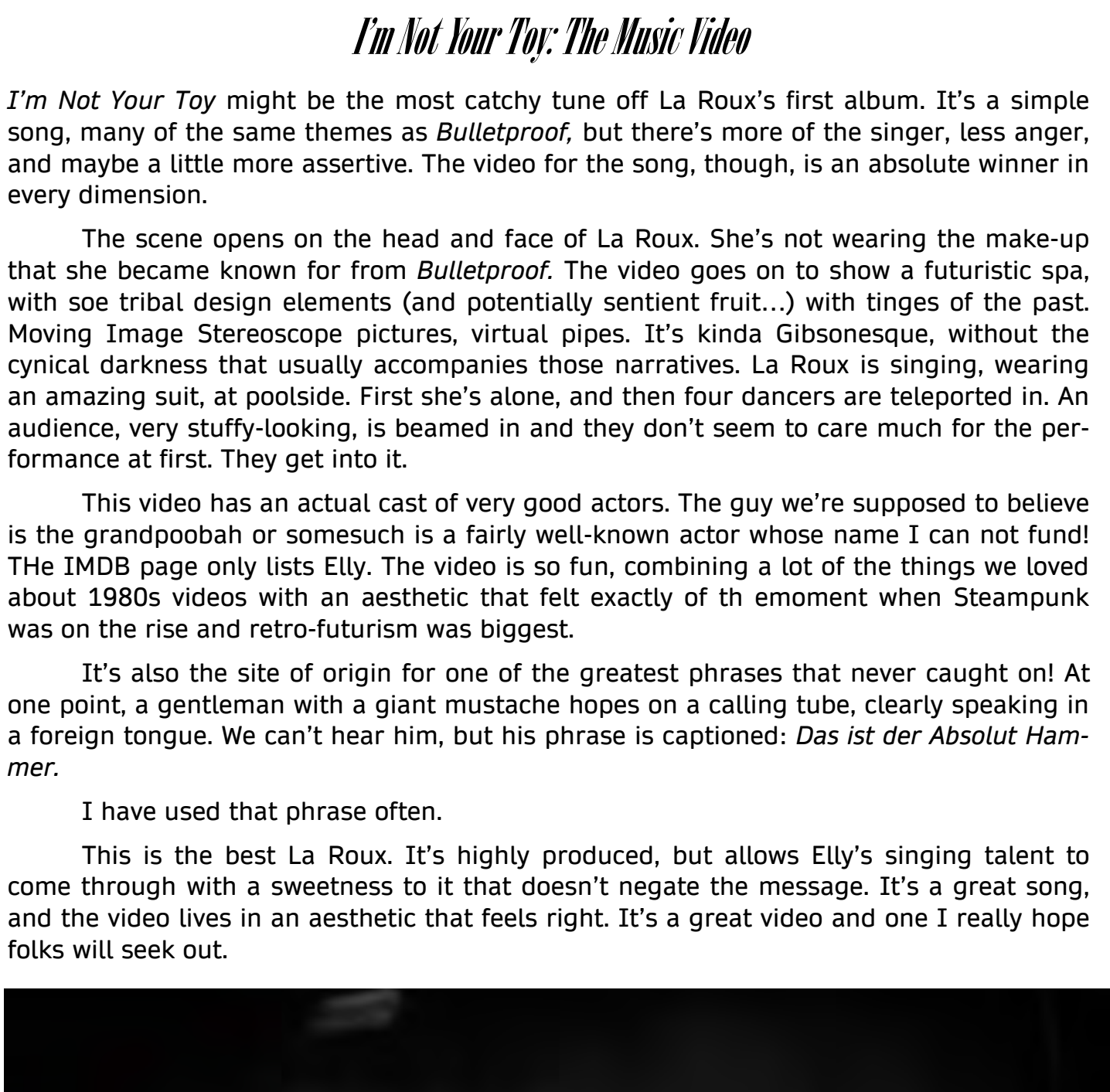
There's a whole lot of sound coming at you the entire way, and none of it sounds like an instrument. That's a sign of understanding music as sound as opposed to music as song. It takes it back to the raw basics. The lyrics, though, are beautiful.

*I won't let you in again
The messages I've tried to send
My information's just not going in
I'm burning bridges shore to shore
I break away from something more
I'm not turned on to love until it's cheap*

*Been there, done that messed around
I'm having fun, don't put me down
I'll never let you sweep me off my feet*

There is a confidence to these lyrics, which are far more spat than sung. This is a confidence song, one where the singer is not asserting their own power, but have had their own power all along and aren't afraid to let everyone know it. This is not a rejection song, nor a try-again song; it is a definition song. We are here to hear what she says she is, and we damn well better get to liking it.

The production here is absolutely top-notch, and perhaps one of the reasons her more recent stuff has not caught on so well is that La Roux the duo could put more into the production side than La Roux the solo. It makes a lot of sense, but a song like this feels like it's a solo performer's song and not the work of a pair. It's an impressive piece of writing, and the song at times feels somehow flimsy, like it's not trying to be taken seriously, but it is a damn serious, damn powerful song. It isn't poking fun at the lightweight of 1980s synthpop like Escape Club or Human League, but it's saying that The New Romantics and folks like Gary Numan were doing incredible stuff.



I'm Not Your Toy: The Music Video

I'm Not Your Toy might be the most catchy tune off La Roux's first album. It's a simple song, many of the same themes as *Bulletproof*, but there's more of the singer, less anger, and maybe a little more assertive. The video for the song, though, is an absolute winner in every dimension.

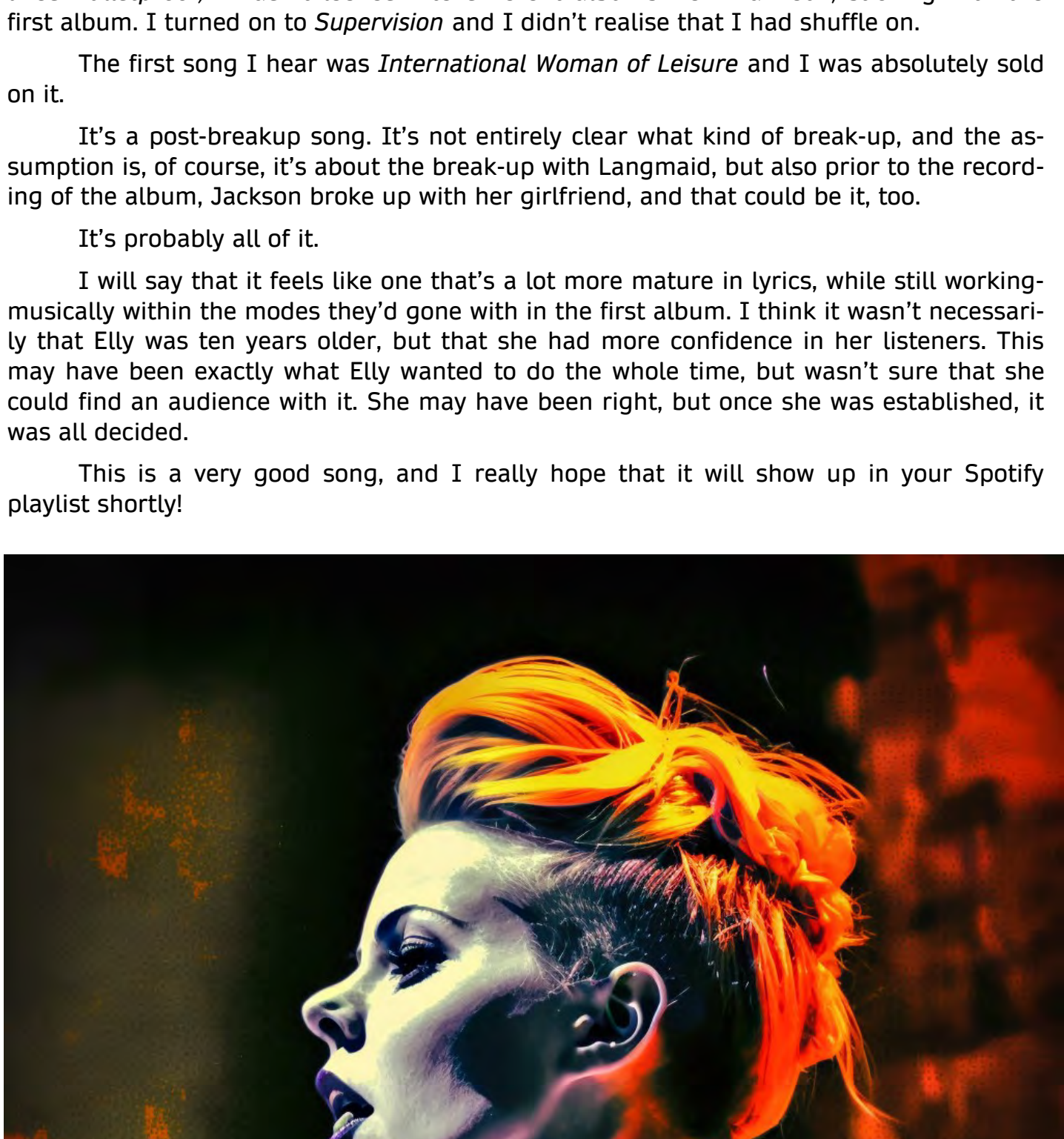
The scene opens on the head and face of La Roux. She's not wearing the make-up that she became known for from *Bulletproof*. The video goes on to show a futuristic spa, with soe tribal design elements (and potentially sentient fruit...) with tinges of the past. Moving Image Stereoscope pictures, virtual pipes. It's kinda Gibsonsque, without the cynical darkness that usually accompanies those narratives. La Roux is singing, wearing an amazing suit, at poolside. First she's alone, and then four dancers are teleported in. An audience, very stuffy-looking, is beamed in and they don't seem to care much for the performance at first. They get into it.

This video has an actual cast of very good actors. The guy we're supposed to believe is the grandpobah or somesuch is a fairly well-known actor whose name I can not fund! THE IMDB page only lists Elly. The video is so fun, combining a lot of the things we loved about 1980s videos with an aesthetic that felt exactly of th emoment when Steampunk was on the rise and retro-futurism was biggest.

It's also the site of origin for one of the greatest phrases that never caught on! At one point, a gentleman with a giant mustache hopes on a calling tube, clearly speaking in a foreign tongue. We can't hear him, but his phrase is captioned: *Das ist der Absolut Hammer*.

I have used that phrase often.

This is the best La Roux. It's highly produced, but allows Elly's singing talent to come through with a sweetness to it that doesn't negate the message. It's a great song, and the video lives in an aesthetic that feels right. It's a great video and one I really hope folks will seek out.



International Woman of Leisure

I found myself seeking out new music from bands I had previously enjoyed about March 2021. The kids were then less resistant to the idea of different musics. While they really liked *Bulletproof*, I hadn't looked into different albums from La Roux, sticking with the first album. I turned on to *Supervision* and I didn't realise that I had shuffle on.

The first song I hear was *International Woman of Leisure* and I was absolutely sold on it.

It's a post-breakup song. It's not entirely clear what kind of break-up, and the assumption is, of course, it's about the break-up with Langmaid, but also prior to the recording of the album, Jackson broke up with her girlfriend, and that could be it, too.

It's probably all of it.

I will say that it feels like one that's a lot more mature in lyrics, while still working-musically within the modes they'd gone with in the first album. I think it wasn't necessarily that Elly was ten years older, but that she had more confidence in her listeners. This may have been exactly what Elly wanted to do the whole time, but wasn't sure that she could find an audience with it. She may have been right, but once she was established, it was all decided.

This is a very good song, and I really hope that it will show up in your Spotify playlist shortly!

Next Week - Fiona Apple!

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