



MUSICSTORE GUIDE

COVER
STORY



THE YEAR OF THE

FEIST

BY BRYAN BORZYKOWSKI
PHOTOGRAPHS: MARY ROZZI

KISSED BY
GRAMMY AND
CAJOLED BY JUNO:
HOW LESLIE FEIST
BECAME THE
WORLD'S HOTTEST
INDIE HEROINE

Most stories on Leslie Feist start with the Toronto songstress sitting in a hotel, sipping a glass of wine. The writer is often parked next to her, lobbing questions about her Grammy- and Juno-nominated album *The Reminder*, her years spent rooming with raunch rocker Peaches, and her experiences in Canadian über-collective Broken Social Scene.

But these days, Feist doesn't have much time to chat in the lobby of a posh hotel, or even spend half an hour on the phone. Trying to land an interview with the country's hottest commodity was futile – and it wasn't because her label didn't try – it's just that the 32-year-old Amherst, N.S.-born chanteuse no longer belongs to the Great White North; she's about as international a superstar as one can get.

Since Feist exploded onto the indie scene in 2004, she's sold nearly 2 million albums worldwide, has had her music appear in numerous commercials, toured from America to Europe to Australia, and she can count Kanye West among her legions of fans. While her last album, *Let It Die*, won her masses of accolades and two Juno Awards three years ago, awards season 2008 is undoubtedly Feist's biggest yet. At press time, she was up for four Grammys and a Brit Award and is heading to April's Juno Awards with five nominations, pitting her against the likes of Celine Dion and Avril Lavigne.

Life wasn't all about accolades and famous friends for Leslie Feist. The songstress grew up in Calgary, Alta., where she started the metal-tinged alt-rock band Placebo when she was 15. She might have kept up her Nirvana-like ways if she hadn't bust up her pipes. "After being in that band for years and competing with the loudness, I eventually killed my voice," said



Feist in an interview with *Venus Zine*.

During a leave of absence from her budding music career, Feist moved to Toronto and learned guitar. She would eventually join popular Canadian indie act By Divine Right, touring as their guitarist and backup singer from 1998 to 2000.

Even though she was traversing the country playing in BDR, she called 701 Queen Street West home. The apartment was above a sex shop, and her roommate was Merrill Beth Nisker, better known as the notorious electro-punk rocker Peaches. Nisker and Feist became friends thanks to another Toronto musician, Jason "Chilly Gonzales" Beck. Gonzales would eventually produce *Let It Die* – Feist's second record – and *The Reminder*. "Leslie was a small-town girl, new in the big city of Toronto," Gonzales has said of Leslie. "I could smell her talent."

In an interview with *The New York Times*, Gonzales recalls hearing about and playing with the guitarist for the first time. "Every musician I knew had had some kind of run-in with her," he says. "She was playing drums with this band or guitar with another band... She was really in a rush to get in as much experience as she could... I remember thinking, 'Wow, if this girl ever gets her focus together she'll be unstoppable.'"

The focus wasn't quite realized on her debut record, the now-out-of-print 1999 release *Monarch*, but after joining Broken Social Scene in 2001 and playing on the group's *You Forgot It in People* a year later, people started to take notice of the fresh-faced vocalist.

The result of some sporadic recording sessions, the jazz-tinged *Let It Die* was released in 2004, but the record, says Feist, was never supposed to see the light of day. "[It] was really an accidental album," she

explained to *Pitchfork*. "We had recorded so many covers and then just a few originals because I really loved those demos. But I didn't want to release them."

Despite her success, her foothold in America was tenuous. After three years of touring and calling Paris home, she hunkered down in Toronto with her new boyfriend and BSS co-founder Kevin Drew, and recorded the album that would turn her into a star. *The Reminder* is an eclectic album, moving from soft introspection to raucous rock 'n' roll. With such fantastically joyous songs as "I Feel It All" and the hit "1234," *The Reminder* is more mature and focused, and even Feist acknowledges that its songs are more realized.

"*Let It Die* was a studio album I had to adapt to the road, but *The Reminder* was the road telling me what I wanted to sing in the studio," she told the *Toronto Star*. "There was a lot more air in my ears. There was more space... [The songs] were a little more tough-skinned, and they had their own shape a little bit more, their own sonic shape."

While her disc might have more space, Feist's world is getting smaller and smaller. Everyone from *Spin* to *Vogue* wants to speak to her; fans from London to Melbourne want to watch her; and everyone can't wait to see what she'll do next. The calm Canuck knows she's in demand, yet she's surprisingly humble. "I don't know what to say without sounding too wide-eyed and naive or off-the-cuff," she says. "So I keep my mouth shut about the hype, because it's something that has so little to do with my control." ●



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THE 1, 2, 3, 4s OF FEIST

Bodega

Very briefly played guitar in this spacey indie-pop group.

Peaches

Ever heard of a rapping, sock puppet-wearing gal named Bitch Lap Lap singing alongside Peaches? Uh, yeah, that was Feist.



1991

Placebo

Feist's first band was so punk, they opened for the Ramones. At just 15, she could wail with the best of them.



1997

Noah's Arkweld

A lack of experience on bass didn't stop her from hitting the deep notes.



1998

By Divine Right

Was the band's guitar slinger for two years, which included a stadium tour with The Tragically Hip.

1999

2001

Broken Social Scene

She's one of many, but she's also the most memorable Scenester.



2008

Constantines

Move over Kenny and Dolly – Feist and the Cons' Bry Webb just wrapped up recording "Islands In The Stream."

