



Mode Of Play

Style maven and one half of DJ duo Ooh La La Zara Martin talks vintage hip-hop, career juggling, and being an ambassador for Women For Women International

Words Mary-Jane Wiltsher

Photography Jamie Gray @ Blood & Co.

Fashion Editor Nini Khatiblou



DJ, model, presenter; it's fair to say that Zara Martin's multitasking skills are none too shabby. The British-Indian-Italian beauty is a triple threat in the genetics department too, all glossy bangs, chocolatey eyes and olive limbs.

A Best Dressed List regular, she's DJ'd for fashion goliaths including Chanel, Versace, and Fendi, and is often spotted cracking jokes on the FROW with best friend and partner in crime, singer-songwriter Whinnie Williams. Together, the pair make up DJ duo Ooh La La, frequently soundtracking London Fashion Week after parties and VIP events.

But there's no evidence of that Mean Girls cliqueness that you might expect of a bonafide 'It' girl. When I arrive at the cover shoot, Martin is chatting animatedly with the crew, pausing to take some behind the scenes snaps on her Fujifilm Instax camera ("I literally take this everywhere with me!") She's fighting a bad cold, but there's zero sign of it as she emerges in a series of this season's key leopard print and denim pieces, always happy to work a little longer to get the perfect shot. It's the type of fuss-free operation that you wish all shoots could be, and stands testament to Martin's professionalism.

Of course, the west London bred 32 year-old is well versed in the world of modeling – she made her first foray into the industry during

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university, partly to help fund her Economics degree, but also as a stepping stone into TV, a career she set her heart on in childhood. “I was mainly going to commercial auditions because I knew that I wanted to do presenting.” She says, once the shoot has wrapped and we settle down for a chat. “Growing up, I always loved music and wanted to be on MTV. Later on I was offered an internship with MTV Base and I hassled them to let me on camera, so eventually I got a show reel together.”

A spell at Al Gore’s Current TV network followed, working on the company’s music and pop culture programming, and it was there

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that the notion of making the shift into DJing first crossed her mind. “Current TV were launching in London at the time, and it was during a period when girl DJs seemed to be popping up everywhere. I went on to ask a DJ I knew to teach me, and a friend of mine who was showing at London Fashion Week wanted me to play at the after party. I was so nervous, I had about six people in the booth standing behind me because I was scared that the music would cut out or something!”

Since her first club booking at The Hoxton Pony, Martin has gone on to play some of the world’s super clubs, taking to the decks after Swedish House Mafia in Berlin (“That was terrifying!”) and following Mark Ronson at a gig in Switzerland, with Williams at her side.

Ooh La La originally formed after Martin and Williams met on a photo shoot. “We instantly hit it off and then kept bumping into each



other. We were both DJing at loads of the same parties, so we were like, ‘why don’t we just do this together?’ It’s so nice to work with your best friend, it makes the whole process seem like a school trip as opposed to work.”

The duo have racked up an impressive bookings track record, playing the Monaco Grand Prix, for Beats By Dre in Berlin, and at an A-lister studded DKNY launch where Rita Ora and Iggy Azalea also graced the stage, to name but a few. Genre-wise, Martin is a confirmed hip hop head, loving both old school and new, with a penchant for vintage RnB too. The track she’s got stuck on repeat

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right now? Rihanna and Drake’s *Work*. “We used to have a hip-hop night at the W Hotel,” she says, breaking into a grin. “I love watching people shake their arses off to RnB and hip-hop, it’s a different kind of fun! But sometimes you need a more open format when you play for big brands that have a music policy.”

Has she ever encountered snobbery about her music preferences from the house loving club contingent? “I actually think that a lot of house orientated cities like London are now leaning back towards RnB and hip-hop, especially the old school, whereas in LA and New York, which have traditionally always been hip-hop hubs, they now love house. Berlin is definitely a dance and techno crowd, but whenever we’ve played there they’ve loved our music.”

It’s apparent that modeling and presenting are taking a back seat to Martin’s DJing at the moment, but it’s not all globetrotting and a



glittering party scene. Outside of the booth, Martin has been busy producing her own best-selling line of design-savvy headphones for cult tech accessory brand Skinnydip London, now stocked in Topshop, Urban Outfitters and NastyGal stateside, and from this month she will be the official face of Estee Lauder's #DoubleConfidence campaign, celebrating the brand's number one foundation, Double Wear. Added to that, she's a passionate ambassador for Women For Women International, a charity gifting female survivors of war with the vital resources and vocational training they need to rebuild their lives and become self-sufficient. Today, the organisation has aided nearly 429,000 marginalised women.

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“I went to a Women For Women gala and met Brita Schmidt, who runs the charity in the UK. I was so honoured when she asked me to become an ambassador, because what they do is incredible. All the money raised goes directly to women in war torn regions, giving them life skills and a means to start a business and provide for their family. For our 'She Inspires Me' campaign, we teamed up with Monica Vinader to make friendship bracelets – the idea is that you nominate a woman who inspires you and have her name engraved on the bracelet, and all the proceeds go to Women For Women. Other ambassadors like Alice Temperley, Charlotte Dellal, June Sarpong and Caroline Issa supported the campaign – it was really cool to have such amazing women involved.”



Between fundraising and compiling set lists, Martin likes her down time to revolve around home comforts. Her Easter plans involve stuffing her face with chocolate, and perfect Sundays centre on the sofa. “A lot of my work is at night, so weekends are all about chilling, good food and watching a box set. Lately I’ve been watching *The Bridge*, *The Fall*, and am on the hunt for new ones.”

The studio is being swept up and the sound system cuts out – it’s officially home time, but before we head off I throw in a final question about how Martin would ideally like to see her career evolve, given that she already has several strings to her bow. Her answer is simple. “I love music, and I love fashion. Ultimately, I want to find more ways of fusing those two things together. More collaborations, more lifestyle products. I have a plan.”

You have to admire a woman who’s successfully shoehorned every single one of her passions into her working life. There’s far more to Martin than 90s jams and knockout looks. This is a woman with a strategy, and there can be little doubt that it’s working.

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