



CREATIVE BRIEF

MISS INDEPENDENT

With her deeply revealing debut album, *CTRL*, alt-R&B artist SZA—who has collaborated with Nicki Minaj and Rihanna—is paving her own way.

BY LAURENCE LOWE PHOTOGRAPHY BY MILAN ZRNIC

IT'S A CLOUDY DAY in Los Angeles, and R&B artist SZA has a classic Beach Boys song stuck in her head. "Bermuda, Bahama, come on pretty mama..." she sings. SZA (pronounced SIH-zuh) seems to be completely at ease. You'd never guess that, by her own telling, she's a bundle of nervous energy constantly in need of release. Whenever she feels like blowing off steam, she engages in "parkour nonsense"—a reference to the French discipline of running, climbing and vaulting over seemingly impossible obstacles.

At 26, SZA, born Solána Rowe, is reminiscent of a young Chaka Khan, with a soulful vocal style and a big personality and curls to match. Since 2012, she has released three EPs and worked with major artists behind the scenes, co-writing Nicki Minaj and Beyoncé's "Feeling Myself" and Rihanna's "Consideration," on which she also sings. With her highly anticipated full-length debut, *CTRL*, which was released in February, SZA is raising her profile. Last spring, she performed at Coachella for the first time, alongside rapper Kendrick Lamar, her Top Dawg Entertainment label-mate. She also shared the stage with Rihanna at the 2016 Brit Awards. Amid the swirl of backstage activity at the ceremony, she felt grateful that she could still maintain her anonymity: "It was like being a fly on the wall," SZA says. "You get to have all the perks with no stress." In January, she made her national television debut on *Jimmy Kimmel Live*, performing her new single "Drew Barrymore," which was inspired by the actress.

Despite her newfound success, she is still coming to grips with the way her industry works. "It's borderline infuriating to think about having to do music as an idea that depends on other people," says SZA, Top Dawg's sole female artist. She remains determined to work on her own terms.

While growing up in the affluent, predominantly white suburb of Maplewood, New Jersey, SZA would often clash with her strict father, a retired CNN news producer. Yet it was through him and his record collection that she was first exposed to foundational musical influences like Ella Fitzgerald, Parliament-Funkadelic and Stevie Wonder.

In high school, SZA, the only black girl on the gymnastics team, listened to everything from Jay Z to Björk, idolizing Pharrell more than almost anyone else. "He showed me that it was OK to be weird," she says. Around the same time, she began making music herself, though she insists she never imagined herself pursuing a career in the field—it was just something that other people always strongly encouraged her to do.

Then, in 2011, while working the merchandise table at a Lamar show, SZA met Terrence "Punch" Henderson, Top Dawg's co-president. Later, he listened to the tracks she'd posted to SoundCloud, and in 2013 he signed her to the label. "SZA's development from the day we met has been phenomenal," Henderson says. "All she wants is to

get better and challenge herself with every song, verse, chorus, bridge, word and note."

SZA's 2014 EP for Top Dawg, *Z*, included the standout track "Julia," which drew the admiration of Gwyneth Paltrow, paving SZA's way to writing for Minaj and Beyoncé and sparking an ongoing correspon-

dence with Coldplay's frontman, Chris Martin. But on some of the EP's other tracks, it's hard to even make out SZA's lyrics over the lo-fi moody mix. When she played *Z* for a friend months later, she realized that she wanted to sing from a more personal place about issues that were meaningful to her—to be heard: "I thought, When I speak I need to say something; I have to be honest."

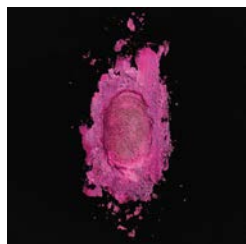
SZA's perspective clearly comes through on *CTRL* with songs like "Supermodel," about the heartache of infidelity. *CTRL* embraces current pop trends ("Love Galore," with a cameo by rapper Travis Scott, has a "Hotline Bling" vibe) without sacrificing her sensibility. "Sonically she's stepped out of every box that people have tried to put her in," says Henderson.

At the end of her day, SZA takes a moment to look through videos in which she and the boys in her band boldly parkour in the Malibu mountains. "You can't think, I'm going to point my toes and land there," she explains. "Thinking creates resistance. You just have to envision yourself landing and do the thing that you want to happen. It's so hard, but it's soooooo fun."

"WHEN I SPEAK... I HAVE TO BE HONEST."

—SZA

STOP, COLLABORATE AND LISTEN



THE PINKPRINT (2014)

The hit track "Feeling Myself"—co-written by SZA—landed Nicki Minaj and Beyoncé on the U.S. Billboard Hot 100 chart, where the song remained for 20 weeks.



THE ALBUM ABOUT NOTHING (2015)

On "The Need to Know," SZA—the only credited female guest vocalist on the record, which also features Usher—sings alongside hip-hop artist **Wale**.



ANTI (2016)

Rihanna tapped the young artist to write and sing on her rebellious eighth album, culminating in the dub-inspired collaboration "Consideration."



UNTITLED UNMASTERED (2016)

SZA lent her writing talents and vocals to "untitled 04 | 08.14.2014" on Kendrick Lamar's critically acclaimed compilation album.



AN AMERICAN IN PARIS

"The French have such a love for American food, but it can stop short at *le burger*," says director Philip Andelman, who when not making music videos for Beyoncé and Taylor Swift is an avid home baker. In February, at the behest of his wife, Sarah (the founder and creative director of the Paris concept store Colette), Andelman launched Stoney Clove Bakery with pastry chef Cassandra Choi. "I wanted to create a no-frills, classic American bake shop for Parisians," says Andelman, who details items from his menu of cookies, pies, cakes and puddings below. *71 rue Greneta, Paris.* —Tarajia Morrell



Chocolate Chip Cookie

"There will be a classic spin on a Toll House cookie and a richer option with Valrhona chocolate, vanilla beans and a mixture of different flours."



Sour Cherry Pie

"The best cherry pies use fresh sour cherries, which are scarce. It's the most ephemeral pie on the menu."



Twinkie

"I had a great recipe for génoise [sponge cake] and thought, Why not just put that in a Twinkie mold, whip up some meringue and pipe it in?"