

20-year-old Griff has always stood out from the crowd. Growing up in Kings Langley; a quiet, quintessentially English Village in Hertfordshire, as the daughter of a Chinese mother and a Jamaican father, she rarely met anybody who looked like her. As a child she yearned to fit in; straightening her hair and making an effort to talk and dress like those around her; but by her late teenage years, Griff realised that being different was her super-power...

“When I was younger, I often felt like I was never Black enough to be Black or Chinese enough to be Chinese; you're in this weird middle-ground. As I’ve grown older, and actually over lockdown especially, I’ve definitely taken a lot of time to reflect on my identity. Seeing the Black Lives Matter movement really erupt forced me to ask myself questions; "How does this affect me? How do I identify? I always knew I stuck out like a sore thumb, and I think that's maybe what's eventually made me so comfortable with *wanting* to be different, especially with music; I never looked or did the same as anyone else, so why start now?”

It’s that innate sense of independence that kicked off Griff’s music career in the first place. “Growing up in a village, you go round to your friends' houses, but there’s no real scene,” she explains. “There aren’t cool clubs or cafes, so after school I would just go home and listen to music.” It was at home that she fell in love with the smart song-writing and powerhouse vocals of Taylor Swift (now, famously, a fan), Lorde and Haim as well as the musicians her Dad, a keen gospel singer, used to play around the house; artists like Stevie Wonder and Aretha Franklin.

Griff was just eleven when she started making music. She borrowed her brother's Logic software, beginning a long process of teaching herself how to record and produce her own songs, completely self-sufficiently. Learning to make music became addictive, and it also provided her an outlet to process her emotions when life felt particularly tough. Griff’s parents are foster carers, and for as long as she can remember, she’s grown up alongside not just her two biological brothers, but a revolving door of foster children. Through music, Griff found a kind of solace; creating raw and ruminative pop songs from the privacy of her bedroom. One of these was Good Stuff; a poignant and heartfelt ballad she released early in her career. While it could easily be about a break-up; the tell-tale donning of rose-tinted glasses where an ex is concerned, Griff wrote Good Stuff as a way of processing her relationship with the foster children who would live with her, become part of the family, but ultimately always leave to go to new homes and start new lives.

It’s this kind of connection and community that motivates Griff as an artist. Her father introduced her to gospel songs, and when Griff joined Hillsong - a modern Evangelical church with a big emphasis on music as a form of worship - she began performing regularly. “From a young age I saw how music is so much more than just something you hear on the radio. People connect to it spiritually, it has healing powers and I've always loved that.” she says. “When I write, I like having the same uplifting quality; a sense of hope that comes with the music. I think that comes from being in church, where music is used in this anthemic, powerful way.”

Griff was still at school when she released her 2019 debut EP Mirror Talk, a rousing yet unflinchingly honest ode to overcoming anxiety and the need to “make up with yourself”. “That title track is about feeling a bit shit” Griff admits. “I wrote it when I was sixteen, and I think when you are a teenage girl, hormones are so heightened and every difficult thing feels like the end of the world. It’s about taking time to just be by yourself, to listen to music and read...to talk to yourself in the mirror.” With Gen-Z, Mirror Talk found a devoted audience who flocked to pop’s new rising star; one who straddled soul and R&B influences, and approached every track with a unique sense of honesty and creativity.

In 2020, even a pandemic could not stop Griff’s growth: under lockdown she released two hugely acclaimed singles, Forgive Myself (complete with a video shot at home on her iPhone), and Say It Again, before being nominated for an Ivor Novello Award (their first Rising Star catageory). Collaborations followed with electronic duo Honne (1,000,000 X Better) and producer Zedd (on his single, Inside Out). Griff then closed out 2020 with two more pinch-yourself moments. She took over the Tate Modern for her second ever London show, framing the singer, producer, DIY fashion designer and budding pop-star as the world-class talent that she is (complete with life-drawings from BIPOC collective, 2B Or Not 2B). Griff was then unveiled as the voice behind Disney’s record-breaking, first ever Christmas ad campaign, performing the stunning track Love Is A Compass (and landing her first charting single in the process).

2021 proved even more transformative for Griff. She won the prestigious Brits Rising Star Award, secured a shortlist in the BBC Sound poll, and became the first female artist to go top 5 with a mixtape on ‘One Foot In Front Of The Other’. The project featured Griff’s first top 20 single, ‘Black Hole’: an inescapable, instant dark-pop anthem, which saw Griff head further down the rabbit-hole of modern teenage life in her own, already-distinct style. “I wrote this song as a bittersweet heartbreak track. I actually love how melodramatic it is, as there’s obviously not *“a big black hole where my heart used to be*”, but the melodrama of the lyrics – over a really interesting beat – keeps the song fun, and not too serious.” Griff followed up with her first ever, sold-out UK tour and the euphoric single ‘One Night’; a confident but deeply considered banger about vulnerability, dread, and the fears at the heart of her generation (brought to surreal life by Griff’s shadow in the accompanying video).

This year, Griff looks set to continue work on her much-anticipated debut album, having also been asked to tour with Dua Lipa on her huge Future Nostalgia dates. She’ll kick things off with the release of brand new single Head On Fire, with Sigrid: the sound of a big, pop-girl friendship that blossomed online during the pandemic, and is now taken IRL with an empowering new anthem. Having both navigated hotly-tipped status as teens, Griff and Sigrid perfectly represent the new wave of female artists focused instead on lifting each other up. Describing how the pair first connected, Sigrid says: “Griff and I met sharing a pizza at the Rueben Selby show at Fashion Week in London, haha. We went to the studio a while later and just had a day of talking about life, before writing Head On Fire. It’s about that feeling when you meet someone who just flips everything upside down and you can’t focus on anything else but that person. Sarah’s just lovely, and it’s been so much fun working with her.”

A multi-faceted, truly fearless talent (she even learned to tightrope-walk for the ‘One Foot…’ mixtape artwork), Griff’s is a fully encompassing world of which she has complete control. “I heard a stat that 2% of music producers are women, and so it feels important that as a young female in the music industry I should empower myself and continue to properly do it.” Hers is the type of creative curiosity that draws no boundaries between making beats or designing your own clothes (as she did for the Brit Awards), not to mention her signature, immediately-identifiable bubble ponytail. Largely confined in that same bedroom, Griff has found herself hailed the new queen of British Pop. “It would be so easy to just put a pair of fishnet tights and a crop top, but I’m trying to keep doing whatever it feels like no one else is doing,” Griff closes. “I want to create my own field, and my own world of pop”.

