

april

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reminds self to purchase some v, v cool green pants

ON THE COVER

Brandon Maxwell coat, dress, and fanny pack. Hirotaka earrings. Harwell Godfrey ring.

On this page: Gucci top, pants, carré, and bracelets. Giuseppe Zanotti heels. Mateo earrings. Harwell Godfrey ring.

Hair: Adrienne Knight. Makeup: Deanna Paley. Manicure: Temeka Jackson. Fashion assistant: Wilford Lenov. Props: Michael Sturgeon for ADB Agency. Production: Crawford & Co Productions. For Saweetie's look, try ColorStay Brow Shape & Glow in Dark Brown, ColorStay Looks Book Eye Shadow Palette in Enigma, SkinLights Prismatic Highlighter in Daybreak Glimmer, ColorStay Liquid Eye Pen in Sharp Line, and Super Lustrous The Gloss in Rose Quartz, all by Revlon.

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SAWEETIE:
THE NAME ON
EXACTLY EVERYONE'S
PLAYLIST

photographs
by
DENNIS
LEUPOLD
fashion
by
CASSIE
ANDERSON



Gucci top, pants, carré, and bracelets.
Giuseppe Zanotti heels. Mateo earrings.
Harwell Godfrey ring.

The princess of pop? Try harder. The queen of hip-hop? Bye. Saweetie—the 26-year-old music phenom behind viral megahits “Jcy Grl,” “Tap In,” and “Best Friend”—is ruling them all. Can you believe they didn’t even see her coming?

WE LIVE ON
**PLANET
SAWEETIE
NOW**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DENNIS LEUPOLD
FASHION BY CASIE ANDERSON
WORDS BY RAWIYA KAMEIR

IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE THAT ANYONE EVER UNDER-ESTIMATED

Diamonté Quiava Valentin Harper.

That they told her there was no way she was smart enough to get good grades in school. That she was too pretty to be taken seriously. That she'd never be a successful rapper.

"I wish me, or someone, would have thought, *You know what? That's not right.*" she says now. Instead, as she puts it, she spent years dimming her light.

Not today though. Today, Saweetie, world-famous rapper, looks like someone you would always bet on. She's perched in the kitchen of the luxe Los Angeles rental she's called home for the past year, casually eating a late lunch of steamed mussels and nigiri sushi. To borrow a phrase from her 2020 hit single "Tap In," she's "drip-pin' in Chanay-nay": a vintage cream-color Chanel blazer over a black bra,

vintage gold Chanel belt, black mini-skirt. A large diamond-studded pendant, shaped like a dripping cross, gleams at her collarbone. Her lip gloss is popping. Even under harsh overhead lights, even through the unnatural veil of a laptop camera, even when she says, "I'm sorry, girl. I keep burping"—yeah, Saweetie is shining bright.

As she should be, because, well, let's pause for a career recap, very much abridged: Her songs have hundreds of millions of streams on Spotify. She earned a 2020 People's Choice Awards nomination for Favorite New Artist; she's had a guest spot on the Freeform show *Grown-ish*. And then there's her proudest moment, making the *Forbes* 30 Under 30 list. It was a huge deal for Saweetie, who earned a business communications degree

from the University of Southern California—with a 3.6 GPA, it should be noted—and who considers herself a multi-hyphenate entrepreneur. "I screamed," she says about when she found out she'd made the list. "It just let me know that I'm on my way to where I wanted to be."

All that and she's also The Content Queen. (Self-proclaimed but still.) You already know this because you're probably one of her 17+ million

Kelsey Randall dress.



followers across Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. And you're probably addicted to her feeds because in a year when other celebrities are cringe-ily doing the most or revealingly doing the least, Saweetie's posts are an irresistible bright spot of actual, authentic fun. She trades bars with her family (PSA: don't try her auntie in a game of In the Classroom), flips a full-length mirror into a must-have travel accessory (the mystery of whether or not

Saweetie legit brought a full-length mirror to a gas station for selfie-while-pumping purposes remains unsolved, but the legend lives on), and hilariously personifies each of her four (!) Birkin bags (a collection gifted, at least in part, in case you were wondering, by her boyfriend, the rapper Quavo). It's like if your group chat were a YouTube channel—real, silly, fun, unself-conscious—if, that is, anyone in your group chat owned a Bentley.

For those keeping track, this all *officially* began in the summer of 2017, with what was then becoming the standard entry point for aspiring unsigned music artists: a video posted on Instagram with the hopes that it'd go viral. And it went very, very viral. In the clip, Saweetie goes off over the familiar beat of Khia's "My Neck, My Back," giving the raunchy anthem a fresh spin with a now-iconic opening



LoQuan Smith; jumpsuit, Mounser earrings, Harwell Godfrey rings; Hair: Adrienne Knight; Makeup: Deanna Paley; Manicure: Teneka Jackson; Fashion assistant: Willford Lenov; Props: Michael Sturgeon for ADB Agency; Production: Crawford & Co Productions.

line: “Can’t stop, won’t stop, get guap / Ten white toes in them Tory flip-flops.” Penned when she had just \$40 to her name, the freestyle went on to become “Icy Grl,” Saweetie’s first big song and introduction to a music industry that had begun to indicate it was maybe, possibly, finally open to supporting more than one female rapper at a time. The track quickly lit up her SoundCloud. Its dreamy SoCal

video, filmed when she was just a year out of college, racked up tens of millions of views. After a label bidding war, Saweetie signed a deal with Warner Records.

But it wasn’t all love and Likes and double-taps. Never forget the Hot 97 interview.

It was February 2018 and is perhaps better described as an ambush. One of

the radio hosts flat-out insults Saweetie, calling her freestyle “basic” and telling her she needs to do a lot more to “impress” him. He seems to suggest she has little to offer but her beauty. Social media quickly glommed on. “It was a really dark point in my life. I went from being so loved so quickly because of ‘Icy Grl’ to, on my first promo run, well, you saw the

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I like getting 4.0s for a straight year.
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she points out. “I was literally thrown into it.” She didn’t yet know how to rip a stage.

Saweetie doesn’t make excuses though. Instead, she works through things. Literally and hard. “I’m really grateful for my start,” Saweetie says. “Because the mistakes, the struggle, the grind—it allows me to appreciate the rewards that come now because I know what it feels like to sleep in motels, to drive and do promo, to be stressed out.” I point out that, no shade, she is an infinitely better rapper and performer today than she was when she emerged and that she seems to have expended as much energy into her songwriting as she has anywhere else. Saweetie agrees, and she wishes more people could see that. That she perfected her stage presence by learning about things like breath control and movement and how to pull off complex choreo *and* rap without missing a beat. That she’s taken vocal lessons and hunkered down in the studio, carefully constructing the songs we can’t get enough of. “Some of us have it naturally. And some of us don’t—like me,” she says. “And that’s okay because I know that as long as I work hard, I’ll become one of the best.”

While we were all on our own 2020 quests toward better versions of ourselves—but from the couch and in sweatpants—Saweetie was soundtracking one of the wildest-ever stretches of time. She owned July 2020 with “Tap In” and then did it again with its mega-remix, featuring Post Malone, DaBaby, and Jack

Harlow, a month later. October brought the Timbaland-produced “Back to the Streets” with Jhené Aiko, and then there was “Best Friend” with Doja Cat just this January. Each single has been more compelling than the last, showcasing a different side of Saweetie’s personality—her style swings from bossy to playful, the sounds have range (a hyphy sample here, an 808s banger there), and the lyrics are stacked with witticisms that double as affirmations. Drop one in that group text: “Bitch, you look good with a ‘t’ at the end.” Hype yourself up in the mirror: “I’m a 5-star bitch with a price tag / Gotta find me somebody that could match that.” Flex on Instagram: “Icy from my lips to my toenails.” The overall mood, though, is consistent—think of it as “No Scrubs” for the TikTok generation. It’s no wonder she’s topped Billboard charts and cracked the Top 20 on the Hot 100.

Honestly, knowing what went into all this is exactly why it’s so easy to root for Saweetie, who’s somewhere between warmly relatable and wildly aspirational. The idea that we don’t arrive fully formed, that part of the point is to do the work in the face of harmful expectations, is familiar, whether your struggle is broadcast to millions of people or not. What’s also familiar is the desire to reclaim that power, to use it even when it feels easier to succumb to the doubts in your head. “Last year was the year that I finally became comfortable in my own skin. I kind of figured out what my

Alberta Ferretti top and boyshorts. Mateo earrings. Harwell Godfrey ring. Chanel clutch and sunglasses.

purpose was,” Saweetie says. “I think it’s important to show little Black and brown girls that they can be successful in whatever they want to do. If I can do it, you can do it too.”

Imagine if Diamonté had had a Saweetie to look up to? Thinking back on it, she remembers a mostly happy childhood, but there were also some trying, character-forming experiences. (And yes, Saweetie’s uncle is MC Hammer and her cousin is Gabrielle Union—just don’t read too much into that. “I don’t come from money,” she says. “I know there’s a misconception because I’m related to them, but that wasn’t my mom and dad in my apartment in Section 8.”) Her parents—a Filipino Chinese mother and a Black father—were determined to give their daughter the freedom of possibility from the very beginning. In fact, that’s how Saweetie ended up with her legal name (her stage name, a nickname from her grandmother, came later). “To a fair amount of people, Diamonté is a man’s name,” she explains. “The workforce is sexist, so my mother, she wanted people to think that I was a man on job applications.” But that didn’t protect her from a teacher once accusing her of plagiarism or from another teacher insisting an attempt at extra credit must have been a ruse to help her friends cheat. “There’s so many things like that that I internalized in my childhood because I thought they were normal,” she says. “But they weren’t.”

Saweetie learned what it feels like to be underestimated because she was Black *and* because she was pretty. Yes, she’s read the tweets and think pieces about pretty privilege, about the ways someone like her can use their looks as unearned currency. “I won’t act like

there isn’t a certain type of power that comes with people admiring your face. But that’s not something that gets me off,” she says. “I like being Female Athlete of the Year. I like getting 4.0s for a straight year. I like knowing that I write my own songs. I like knowing that I create my own treatments. I like knowing that I donated \$150,000 to Black Lives Matter.” It’s why she’s naming her first

studio album, out this spring, *Pretty Bitch Music*. “It’s my way of taking back all those years where I feel I had to dim my light,” she says.

She began to reclaim that glow in college, right around the time she was asked to perform a song in front of a business class (penance for showing up late) during her sophomore year. She chose to do her own track, and the class of 60 “was completely blown

away,” her professor, Albert Napoli, tells me over the phone. So later, when he saw Saweetie clutching her résumé at a campus career fair, “I think I said, ‘What the F-word are you doing here? This is not you. If you went and got a job, you would die. Go chase your dream,’” he remembers. “She and I talk about how that was kind of the seminal moment, where someone like me should have said, ‘Oh, yes, that’s a safe thing to do, go get a job, use this USC degree.’ But that was not her. She was one of the few people that I knew would give every single ounce of herself in order to try to make it.”

More proof, if you need it: She tells me she’s still not done with *Pretty Bitch Music* because it’s not completely perfect yet. “I’m always looking at it,” she explains. “It’s like having an essay that’s not due yet. I’m going to keep rereading it, editing it, switching out words for better words.” She’s also been busy, you know, with the responsibilities of being a pop star on the rise: She builds mood boards, works on merch, makes even more content at the clip of a full-time creative agency. She’s also got a jewelry line, an edge-control collaboration fit for “the baby-hair princess,” a co-branded makeup collection with Morphe, and a PrettyLittleThing capsule fashion collection that just counted its third drop. Oh, and she recently launched a nonprofit, The Icy Baby Foundation, with her grandmother to support single mothers, low-income communities, education efforts, and people living with autism. “Money beats court cases, money buys medicine, money fixes potholes, money puts food on the counter, and money keeps the heat and electricity going,” she says. “So if I can spread the wealth, that’s what I want to do.”

When I ask her what she does when she’s not doing all this, when she’s

HAVE IT NATURALLY.

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And some of us don’t—like me. And that’s okay

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not working, when she needs to decompress and maybe remind herself that she’s a human being, Saweetie stares at the screen. We look at each other for a few awkward seconds until her point is sufficiently clear: “I am not a human being.”

Point taken. Point very freaking clear. Saweetie may not be one of us, but she’s making a whole new world for us to live in by showing us what really, actually is possible—even if you’ve doubted it, dimmed your light, taken no for an answer. And yeah, it feels good. With a “t” at the end.

Valentino dress. Gianvito Rossi heels. Mateo earrings. Panconesi ring.



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