

Music Week

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SINGLES
5 UK
NO.1S

CHART-TOPPING PHENOMENON CAMILLE 'KAMILLE' PURCELL STARS IN **HITMAKERS** 2019

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Welcome to the music week...



MusicWeek
20.05.19

The power of one



As Taylor Swift notes on her big comeback tune: "I'm the only one of me, And baby that's the fun of me".

Swift, of course, has maintained her unique voice, even when writing songs with others. But for other artists, that can be more of a struggle, as co-writing credits continual to spiral in the pursuit of those elusive streaming smashes.

Music Week's annual survey of the number of writers on the UK's biggest hits shows that 5.34 is now the magic number needed to score one of the biggest singles of the year (see P4). The higher up the chart you go, the more writers you need: the Top 30 hits were written by an average of 6.7 people, too many to fit in a cab home after the session.

Both those numbers are up on last year, but there are signs 2019 might finally see that trend going into reverse. A new breed of writer-artists, from Freya Ridings to George Ezra, Billie Eilish to Tom Walker, are showing that you can have success with songs created by just one or two people.

None of those artists fit the generic pop template, which may be why their work is connecting with people on a level beyond a single hit. It remains the dream for every label to break artists rather than just songs, so you do wonder why quite so many resources sometimes get dedicated to diluting those artists' vision.

The way streaming playlists function often seems to make hits converge to similar sonic templates. The trend towards more distinctive UK solo voices has surely been born out of a desire for less cookie-cutter pop music, and, significantly, seems more driven by radio – still willing to take a chance on an artist – rather than the DSPs.

After all, in a business where standing out has never been more important, why choose to get lost in a crowd? You're the only one of you. And while that's the fun of you, it might also be the key to your success.

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"Feeling good now you're out of my life"

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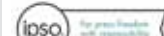


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“We celebrated two No.1s last year which, for me as a black female from the UK, is unheard of as a writer”

**CAMILLE
PURCELL**

**Shout out to my
hits:** Camille
‘Kamille’ Purcell shot
for Music Week at
BMG’s London HQ

COVER STORY

ONE IN A KAMILLION

To kickstart our **Hitmakers 2019 special**, we catch up with **BMG's** songwriter extraordinaire **Camille Purcell**. From writing smashes for **Little Mix**, **Clean Bandit** and **Mabel** to upcoming work with **Stormzy** and her own music released under the name **Kamille**, *Music Week* meets a rising star on fire...

— BY GEORGE GARNER —
PHOTOS: PAUL HARRIES

Believe it or not, there was once a time when Camille Purcell – one of the hottest songwriters in the world right now – plied a very different trade: stockbroker. “Oh my gosh, I hated it so much,” laughs the one-time economics student as she relaxes in her publisher BMG’s London HQ. “I sat watching screens all day that looked like *The Matrix*. I felt like Neo!”

Suffice to say, around this time there was a substantial gulf between who Purcell was and who she wanted to be. When she paints a picture of herself as an aspiring songwriter, she notes it wouldn’t be unusual if you found her belting tunes out loud on the train, or scribbling lyrics, poems and ideas down at work. She was also a common sight at various London studios – which her father helped her get into – trying to soak in as much information as she possibly could while lurking in the corners. This apprenticeship could have gone on for years, but she soon struck gold – literally, in terms of the eventual sales of her breakout hit.

“I didn’t know what I was doing,” she recalls. “I was trying to get in anywhere I could, and then I wrote a song for *The Saturdays* and it went to No.1. That’s when I was like, ‘OK, I’m going to leave my job.’”

The 2013 song in question was *What About Us* feat. Sean Paul [which has sold 553,843 to date according to the Official Charts Company]. Purcell recalls nearly crashing her car when she heard it on Capital.

“I’d never had a song on the radio before,” she laughs. “That was so special, I never knew anything like that could happen to me. I was so lucky that I had such a quick break, because it allowed me to be in certain meetings and rooms. For the next three years, I had to hustle to prove myself, not only to the industry but to my parents. They were like, ‘You can’t leave your job!’”

For Purcell, however, there was no going back.

“I can’t explain it other than feeling that my heart was burning,” she says. “A lot of people have that when they make 180-degree changes in their life – they just know it. I was so grateful for my education but I knew that wasn’t my path – music was bursting out of me. Thank God I took that chance. I’m not saying it was easy afterwards, after that I was

in a million sessions: you have to hustle and go round all the sessions and work with loads of people – difficult people – and find your place.”

Life has been full of surreal moments ever since then, like the time she worked with legendary producer Timbaland.

“I was nervous,” she admits. “I remember he hadn’t turned up at the session, so every time someone walked through the door I’d turn to stone and it would be an engineer or someone asking if I wanted water. Then he walked in... And I rapped his own songs to him!”

It was, to be sure, a gamble. Or, in Purcell’s words...

“It was one of the most cringe things you could ever do. Why did I do that!? I was rapping to him, just verbal diarrhoea. I was so nervous.”

How did he respond, we hear you say?

“He was just looking at me like, ‘This girl’s crazy.’ But one thing I think I’m so blessed to be able to do is get on a mic and go into the zone. It feels like a superpower, I forget everything and just sing things. I can’t explain where they come from. For me, I know they come from God. But to anyone who’s not Christian, it’s something that can’t be explained. It comes out of you. I was on the piano playing this thing I’d written to Timbaland as he was standing by it and I was like, ‘Oh my God,’ I was so nervous, but the love of music got me through it. Same with Rihanna, we were writing in a room and she came in and was dancing. She is so beautiful and so lovely. Seeing how she interacted with everyone in that room, saying hi to every engineer, things like that really inspire me.”

Yet even if Purcell wasn’t adept at making ironclad bangers, you sense artists would still gravitate to her. As soon becomes apparent from spending some time in her company at BMG, she is a charming, perma-laughing person: an upbeat, positive vibe emanates from her at all times. Naturally, those ironclad bangers help, too.

Indeed, Purcell’s intimidating CV stands to give even the most accomplished hitmaker a complex. The BRIT, Global, ASCAP and BMI Award-winning writer’s résumé consists of over four billion combined streams, hundreds of hours of airplay around the world, five UK No.1s, eight UK Top 5s and over 25 UK radio playlisted records. Included among her major hits are Little Mix’s *Black Magic* (1,431,659 – OCC)

and Shout Out To My Ex (1,518,496 – OCC). Moreover, she was so successful in 2018 that she actually entered into a fierce competition at the top of the singles charts *with herself* when her co-write on Jess Glynne's I'll Be There (919,932 – OCC) passed the baton to Clean Bandit feat. Demi Lovato's Solo (1,044,300 – OCC, with 560 million streams on Spotify alone to boot).

"Oh my gosh, last year was crazy for me," she beams. "We celebrated having two No.1s, which for me, as a black female from the UK, is kind of unheard of as a writer. There are not a lot of females as it is, so to be able to represent a lot of girls last year – and with everything being really female-centric in terms of what we were doing as women and standing up for each other – was really important."

This only looks set to continue in 2019. Purcell has already notched up a big smash with Mabel's international hit Don't Call Me Up making waves both in the UK (617,866 – OCC) and the US (the song was Mabel's first to crack the Hot 100).

"Honest to God, all three of us never thought it was going to be as big as it was," she insists. "We wrote it so fast, maybe in an hour and a half. Steve [Mac, who was awarded *Music Week's* Songwriter Of 2018 honour] is a genius, he'll get on a synth and play a million things that all sound like a hit and you're just singing on top. Me and Mabel were humming and it came so quickly, which makes you think, 'Is it good or a fluke?' We thought it was strong, but I didn't think it would ever be an American crossover hit. That is blowing my mind."

Her publishers at BMG are, to put it lightly, gushing about their rising star.

"It's easy to say she's the biggest topliner in the UK right now and she's just going from strength to strength," says Lisa Cullington, vice president, creative at BMG. "She has a talent which is undeniable and I haven't come across many like her. Her determination and enthusiasm to succeed coupled with her down-to-earth nature brings the best out of everyone she works with. She's a force to be reckoned with."

Crucially, this force manifests itself in more ways than one. If Camille Purcell is one name people recognise, there is another associated with her, too.

'Kamille' is now used to represent both her career as a songwriter and her work as a burgeoning recording artist. And about that name...

"I couldn't have Camille because it belonged to a knicker company!" she laughs. "That's literally the only reason we changed it to Camille with a K. But I like it now, the joke's on you knicker company – I'm alright. I want people to accept me for both, but Kamille is who I am now. It feels really exciting, like a new start."

You might have spotted the name Kamille on the credits of Little Mix's LM5: not only did she contribute seven songs to it, she also featured on More Than Words.

"I wrote it with them in mind, I never thought we'd do a duet – it was their suggestion," she explains. "I was singing the demo and I think they could see I was singing it for them, about them, with us all in mind. They said, 'We want this to be all of us together on this.' It was a beautiful thing, maybe the first time in a long time that a pop group have added their writer on a song. It's so touching."

"It's crazy because I'm part of the Mixer family which is so sweet – and now they've gone into the Kamillion world," she adds. "There are Kamillions now and they're crazy. I love pasta, so every day they come up with different ways of putting my head on a different piece of pasta. I love them. I'm so grateful to Little Mix for that, they really helped embrace me into the pop world as an artist."

"I've learned that the things happening to me as a writer are actually helping me as an artist. It's win-win"

**CAMILLE
PURCELL**



Kamille's rise continues apace – most recently she served up Emotional via her label Virgin EMI, and its stellar remix featuring Stefflon Don & Chip.

“Now, there is another creative force driving Kamille, and that is her burgeoning artist career,” is Lisa Cullington's overview. “BMG is proud to be team Kamille and we're excited to be a part of what comes next.”

Speaking of what comes next, as a songwriter she is working with Dua Lipa, Anne-Marie, Clean Bandit, Sam Smith, Mabel and Raye. And that's to say nothing of collaborating on one of the year's most anticipated albums: Stormzy's grand return.

“We've been working on his album for a while now – maybe three or four songs,” she offers. “We'll see what happens when it gets whittled down. Vossi Bop is incredible, I'm so happy for him – he's such an amazing talent. He has so much integrity. When you're writing with him it's not easy, you pick at everything until it's right. I really respect that about him. He won't just take any old song or lyric. He's a songwriter, he actually writes choruses and ballads; Stormzy can write a full ballad. He has amazing lyric concepts. It's an honour writing with him and this album is going to be crazy.”

So, with Purcell enjoying a purple patch that shows no sign of stopping, it's time to grill her about all things songwriting in 2019...

With great success comes great pressure. How have you coped with the mental strain of being a hitmaker?

“I read a book called Big Magic [by Eat Pray Love author Elizabeth Gilbert] which I encourage every writer to read as it's for creatives. It explains the notion that ideas come to us and we can agree to go into contract with that idea or let it go. It personifies the idea so you're not thinking it's [part] 'of you' or that you're responsible for any creative thought you have.

What that helped me do was, if I didn't have a good day in the studio, I wouldn't think that was my fault: the idea just didn't come to me. That helped me separate the blame when, a lot of the time, songs don't come. Sometimes they just don't. You can have the perfect set of people in a room – the biggest hit writers – and you'll all end up ordering Chinese and talking about EastEnders and nothing will happen. That happens to me more times than I'll get a hit. It's just trying not to apply that pressure to yourself. But at the same time, I'm not going to lie, sometimes I do feel like I've got to the point where they go, ‘Camille's in the room so we might get something half decent.’ What's interesting is the more pressure, the more confident I'm able to become.”

Where is pop music going in 2019?

“It's moving so fast. The one thing streaming's done is allow anyone to break off a cool song, it doesn't even have to be a massive pop hit, it can be a weird song. People you never thought would be heard are being heard now; everyone has a voice.”

Has the advent of streaming changed the way you write songs?

“For me, it's just like having an update on your iPhone. I think, ‘That's the way music's going to update’ and for us, as songwriters, we have to move with the times. You



Hit squad goals:
(Clockwise from top right)
Kamille with Stormzy, Little Mix, Timbaland and Jess Glynne

“It's easy to say Kamille's the biggest topliner in the UK right now. She's just going from strength to strength”

LISA CULLINGTON,
BMG

definitely want the catchiest bits at the front of the song – it's seven seconds before someone skips. That's crazy to me, that people are that unbothered and uninterested because they have so much music to listen to. But, honestly, for that reason, I'm trying to take the burden off them: I want them to buy into something as quickly as possible. Of course that does have an impact on creativity. As an artist, I have more liberties in that I can be a bit more free with my music. I'm trying to build my proposition. I want people to know about my creativity, that was the most important thing for me last year. But that's not to say I'm not going to come up with songs that feel like a hit straight away because I think that's important.”

And what is your dream as a solo artist?

“I want to be heard by as many people as possible and really connect with people – I would love to do headline tours and be playing piano on stage and dancing. I have so many ideas and images in my head, I've been dreaming of it since I was a kid. I've had so much support so far, especially from iXtra and the urban world, that's where I come from. As much as I write pop hits, I write all kinds of songs. My love is urban music, but I don't ever want to put myself in a box.”

As a songwriter, how do you decide what to keep as an artist and what you give away?

“It would drive me crazy just talking about my own shit all day. I have to be able to write for other people. It comes back to the book Big Magic again: I just believe that I'll write another one. If I've done it once, I'll be able to do it again. I think the fear of not being able to do that again makes you feel like you should keep everything. Obviously, there are a few where it's like, ‘No! No! No!’ but that doesn't happen very often. I'm very understanding of the business side of it, there are some songs I might want but I'm not ready to put them out yet as I'm building my artist career. In a year's time I might put it out, but who's to say that, right now, Rihanna might want that song? I'm going to give it to her! Those things help your artist career too. I'm learning that the things that are happening to me as a writer are actually helping as an artist. It's all a win-win.”

In some ways you've had a brilliant apprenticeship, in that you've really seen what it take to be an artist first hand...

“It's not easy. I've seen so many people come and go which is the scariest thing, it's taught me to be really humble and lovely to people, because you can just come and go, and be forgotten

so fast – it’s so horrible that side of this industry. It taught me to be kind, humble and respect people – and bring love to a session and the industry. When I get in a session, all I want to do is just talk to that person and find out if they’re alright. And figure out what the artist wants, and not what the label want.”

How do you juggle that, if a label want a hit and the artist wants something else?

“Because I’m a very real person, I’ll give the artist advice on what I think. I’m not just like, [*adopts American accent*] ‘Yeah! Let’s just make a magical song about rainbows for you!’ I’ll be real with them in allowing them to do what they want as well. I worked on X Factor and shot right into meetings with Simon Cowell. I was a coach and kind of A&R-ing with the artists musically and coming up with ideas and songs all the time – you’ve got to be their confidant. It’s driven a lot of my writing.”

Do you define success by a song being a hit?

“I love doing album songs, but I would also love a hit on there too. That happens a lot on Little Mix’s albums. A lot of them weren’t singles, but it’s nice when you have a single. It’s so hard to even get cuts now and be in the right place at the right time. As long as it’s something I respect and rate, I’m happy.”

On the business side, what have you learned?

“I’ve learned about being fair. We’ve all been burned a lot when it comes to splits, credits – every songwriter has their share of issues. The most important thing you can be as a songwriter is honest and fair. That will give you such longevity.”

Why was BMG the right home for you?

“I just love them. There were talks of me signing with them before, it didn’t work out and I went to Sony/ATV and it’s now that the timing has worked out. Lisa Cullington and Shani Gonzales [A&R co-head] are incredible, and being surrounded by such incredible women drove me here, seeing them just be a boss and making amazing moves. And I love Alistair [Norbury, president, repertoire & marketing, UK], he’s given me such amazing opportunities. They really know how to connect with you as a person here. We’re not just a

“Some songs are written just to get you into a room. They might not be meant to be a hit”

CAMILLE PURCELL



Not your run of the Kamille hitmaker:
Camille Purcell

number, songwriters want to talk. They’ve done more for me here than I can ever imagine. They got me in a session with Rihanna, that was my first assignment. Straight away I was just whisked off. They’re amazing.”

How do you feel about remuneration for songwriters in the streaming age?

“Don’t be under illusions, if you’re a big hit writer it’s still difficult, you still don’t know when you’re getting paid, you still suffer and don’t know what the hell’s going on. It’s hard for all of us. In no way am I thinking it’s easier on me, I’ve definitely got more experience to know that when you’re starting out, you’re so anxious thinking nothing is going to happen and I know for these writers it will happen. Patience is everything. In the meantime, we just have to support each other and do the right thing. I just wish things could be fair.

That’s all I wish. Really, in any industry you want to be paid fairly and have your name on the thing. If you’re an accountant, you wouldn’t do a whole day’s work and then not be paid the right price for it. All industries’ pay should be fair and I hope everything can be resolved because people are getting really upset. I think it’s about unity and equality, wherever we go.”

And what else do songwriters need from the music industry right now – what could help?

“More free dinners [*laughs*]. If we had more free dinners, we’d be a lot happier! I don’t know if it’s just me. Just feeling people care when they have meetings with songwriters, not just treating them like they’re there for a song and talking to them as a person and building a relationship. A lot of the A&R people I’m so close with now have come through a lot of us eating, talking and building relationships and then I send them stuff. I love sending voice notes to people...”

So you’ll send a future hit over voice notes?

“All the time! That’s how Little Mix’s album was written. Loads of songs have come that way – Black Magic was a voice note. Someone like Briony [Turner, co-head A&R, Atlantic], who A&Rs Jess Glynne and Clean Bandit, I send her stuff all the time. We finished writing Solo over voice note. That’s the best way. When you’re friends with A&R people as a songwriter they don’t feel it’s a big deal to say, ‘I don’t like this’ or ‘Can you change that?’ You just go back and forth.”

In those instances, how do you deal with rejection?

“I don’t get upset. I sound really, really cheesy, but I just feel like I’m not mad because I love the song. One of my managers taught me when I first started: every song has a purpose, and it’s not always the purpose you think. Some songs are written just to get you into a room or be heard by someone, or an A&R. They might not be meant to be a hit. It changed my whole mindset. It’s all good.”

We’re guessing that, far from rejection, your phone must be ringing a lot on the back of your success...

“My poor managers deal with a lot. I have no idea, I just sit at home watching Come Dine With Me and then someone goes, ‘Can you do this?’ I swear to you. I’m always the one going, ‘Can I work with this person? Can I work with that person?’”

So, let’s manifest some hits to wrap things up. Who do you want to work with?

“Pharrell, Calvin Harris and Beyoncé. I watched the Homecoming documentary and it was ridiculous, it reminded everyone to sit down: the Queen is here. Every day I’m trying to get songs to Beyoncé!”