

Arlissa.

On singer-songwriter Arlissa's breakthrough track "Hearts Ain't Gonna Lie," she coos about the reality of truth always peeking through in life and love. It's a mantra that the 25-year-old German-born, south London-bred siren has maintained throughout the entirety of her journey in music. As Arlissa enters the next phase of her career—armed with a dancey reboot of her viral hit thanks to Jonas Blue—she continues to promote honest music on her own terms.

The product of a German father and Louisiana-born "army kid" mother, Arlissa moved to London at six months old. Young Arlissa would sing throughout her home, and for a child it was clear that the talent was there. The true extent wouldn't hit until 14, when Arlissa told her father she wanted to someday write songs and record them. It was then that her father had her watch Prince's magnum opus *Purple Rain*, as he previously performed in a Prince cover band. "From that point on, I started seriously writing songs," she recalls.

At 15, she set foot in her first studio, though she would take the next few years of her life to hone her craft. Label interest was there, as Arlissa signed to Capitol Records (then called London Records in the UK) on the spot at 19, though the fit wasn't quite right. "In retrospect, it was the hastiest decision I ever made." Attempts to package her as the next Shakira, Arlissa fell victim to marketing machines driving her in a different direction than she imagined. Her co-written collaboration with Nas "Hard To Love Somebody" propelled her notoriety even further.

She piqued on the UK Pop radar, making the BBC's Sound Of 2013 poll alongside acts like Laura Mvula, Haim, Aluna George, Savages, The Weeknd, and CHVRCHES with no formal album or single release. Concurrently however, Amy Winehouse's posthumous single "Cherry Wine" with Nas also dropped, and Arlissa's buzz was brought down to a hum. "It was the first big mistake," she explains.

Her follow up "Sticks and Stones" was also met with acclaim, though Arlissa didn't feel like herself in the music. "It was all too much banking on something that wasn't 100% authentic," the singer admits. "I wasn't as invested. I'm lucky I learned it quite young. The thing I didn't know was that I had more power to voice my opinion. At the end of the day it was my career, not their career."

Arlissa then continued on a DIY mission, releasing music via the internet and rebuilding her buzz. "I had all of these songs I wrote and thought to myself when would anyone hear this?" she says. She took to the Internet to release original songs, along with a YouTube cover as a litmus test. She dropped the acoustic version of "Hearts Ain't Gonna Lie," which yielded over a million views in less than one week. It wasn't long before a true fan following was formed. "I had no management, no following, but to see the feedback made me realize that I *can* do this," she confidently adds. "I had options, and they were right in front of me the whole time."

One admirer in particular was UK house DJ and production phenomenon Jonas Blue, who elevated "Hearts Ain't Gonna Lie" with his own spin after hearing it online. "From the first time we talked, he completely got the fact that I wanted people to be able to hear the chords. To hear that it was an existing song already," she says of Blue's guidance. "Any other producer would want to leave their mark on things, which I get...but not if that detracts from my song. This is my baby."

The major labels inevitably reemerged, yet past experience left a bad taste in her mouth. "I just didn't want to sign anything unless I had control over my music and my identity," she explains. She found a home at Def Jam with a singles deal that works in tandem with Arlissa's vision. The first step is Jonas Blue's rhythmic remix of "Hearts Ain't Gonna Lie," and all else will follow. "[Def Jam] made me feel like they really believed in me and the power of the song," she said. "This time it was a fit." While the song has upped its tempo, the integrity of her strong lyrics and sentiment remains in tact. "It was a song that wrote itself," Arlissa explains of the track's straightforward direction. "It's a song about acceptance and realizing that some love isn't right for you, which isn't necessarily a bad thing."

Live performances will soon come, as live instrumentation will hug her raw lyrics and honest melodies. "Touring is a big deal for me," she expresses. "I want everyone to hear the music in its purest form."

While Arlissa will continue dropping loosie tracks in anticipation of her debut album, she upholds her vow to make her music by her rules and having fun along the way. “At the moment I’ve been having a really good time writing and releasing songs—making my music on my terms,” she happily says. “It isn’t always easy, but it feels right.”