

Unconventional love song lands local singer-songwriter UK title



By Brock Weir

Setting out to write a love song, the last thing Aurora singer/songwriter Lauren Haze wanted was a 'basic' pop song. That's just not her style.

She didn't want a ballad where she would appear upset, or even falling in love, but when she set pen to paper the first words that came to mind were 'I won't make you stay.'

This was the first building block to her single of the same name. Working with producers to tweak the concept, this song about not making someone stay in a relationship captured the collective attention of a diverse panel of award-winning industry professionals, who named Ms. Haze, 22, the Top Singer/Songwriter in the 2015 UK Songwriting Contest.

'When I found out I was in the semifinals, I was just so excited and over the moon,' says Ms. Haze. 'It was just an incredible feeling. I am not a super-emotional person, but I just started crying because I knew how competitive this one was and I think there were up to 8,000 entries. To win a contest that judges vocals as well [as songwriting] was just really important to me and I am really excited about it.'

Ms. Haze 'the professional name of Lauren Hoyles' always knew she had something to say, but this creativity needed a proper outlet. She was never a partier, she says, and always knew 'it needed to come out one way or another.'

Spending a lot of time in and out of the Hospital for Sick Children from the time she was three to the age of 16 with a thyroid condition, she found each visit to be an increasingly emotional one, seeing children battling serious illness and the families that came around to keep spirits high.

'It gave me a really deep, intimate look at the emotions people go through on a daily basis,' she recalls. 'That is when I started to think about writing and making people feel a certain way. I wanted emotion to be a part of my life and not necessarily negative emotions. I just wanted to make people feel something somehow.'

She began to dabble in singing and songwriting at the age of 12, but it is not something she decided to seriously pursue until she was 19, not confident enough that people would actually want to hear her husky voice. She is the first to admit hers is not a voice that lends itself to the sounds of bubble gum pop, but her world opened up when her father began introducing her to the likes of Bob

Dylan.

So, Lauren Hoyles exited stage left to make room for Lauren Haze.

'Everyone has said I have a smoky voice and it sounds like I smoke a pack of cigarettes before I sing, but I don't even smoke!' she says with a laugh. 'I was in line to audition for Honey Jam with one of my really good friends and the name just popped into my head. I ran it by a few people, but not everyone was sold on it, but I was so happy with it. It sounded so cool, but a few people were like, 'Really?''

Not only does she think the new name sounds cool, but it will do wonders for name recognition. Singers like Demi Lovato have followers like the 'Lovatics', so why can't Lauren Haze have the 'Hazers', she ponders out loud with a smile.

Taking home the honours at the UK Songwriting Contest, 2016 might just be the year of the Hazer and, if 'I Won't Make You Stay' is any indication of a future fan base, this will be an empowered group of women and men.

'I am not somebody who has been in a long-term relationship or anything, so when I write and don't have super-personal experience, I really have to focus on putting myself in other people's shoes,' she says. 'I listen to my friends complain about their relationships and I see the way girls are in their relationships and think, 'I wouldn't put up with that!' or 'I am going to put myself first.' A lot of it was me advocating being a strong woman in a relationship. I wanted to make it an empowering love song for a woman or a man rather than just being upset or just falling in love.

'There is no experience like singing your own songs. It gives you such a sense of empowerment and it just feels so effortless and natural singing your own stuff because you know it is coming from your heart. I hope this win brings some recognition, especially from the UK. They have a really great music scene and I am hoping it opens a door to a new audience over there. My ultimate goal is to get signed, even to an indie label, to have a label that is advocating for you. It is hard as an independent artist to reach as many people as you can. You can reach a lot of people on social media, but you can't draw a massive crowd without a lot of hype and marketing and we don't have the resources for that.'

In the meantime, Ms. Haze is focusing on building her YouTube channel and the completion of her EP, featuring her new song 'Flatline', which she hopes is ready for release in the next month or two.