

'MY BIGGEST FEAR IN LIFE IS THAT I'LL NEVER BE SATISFIED'

SEVEN UK NO 1s, FOUR GRAMMYS, AN OSCAR – AND HE IS ONLY 26. SAM SMITH HAS THE WORLD AT HIS FEET. STYLE'S **SCARLETT RUSSELL** JOINS HIM ON TOUR TO TALK BREAK-UPS, THERAPY AND FIGHTING FOR ROMANCE

Photographs **Beau Greal**
Styling **Charlie Casely-Hayford**

Sam Smith

SAM SMITH IS FEELING FRAGILE. Last night he performed to 21,000 people in downtown LA, afterwards hitting the gay bars of West Hollywood. "We were just screaming Beyoncé requests at the DJ and dancing all night," he says, leading me onto the terrace of the Hollywood mansion he has been renting for the West Coast leg of his world tour. "I love going out. And I love my gay bars. But I'm not that wild. My big nights are behind me. It's not good for my voice to overdo it. Also, big parties give me anxiety."

I'm meeting Smith during the tour for his second album, *The Thrill of It All*. Since March, he has done 66 shows, everywhere from Sheffield to Arizona. He says his British fans are "incredible", but for a softly spoken singer from Hertfordshire the adoration in America is extraordinary. As I watched him last night, the hysteria from fans was deafening, screams so wild they made me wince. You might expect that reaction at a Justin Bieber concert, but Sam Smith? He of such lyrics as, "you've been so unavailable... your heart is unobtainable"? "I know," he laughs, still floored by the fandom. "My music feels quite depressing. I don't know what the word is. I love my music but end up slating it all the time."

During a recent gig in Mexico City, fans placed coloured plastic over their phone screens, a different colour for each section of the arena, so that when they held them up in sync, it looked like a huge pride flag coming from the audience. It had been meticulously planned, with several thousand fans communicating on forums. "My BVs [backing vocalists] were holding back tears, I was speechless," says Smith. "Moments like that are like an out-of-body experience. In the US, they really love a singer. They love sad songs."

Sad songs are Smith's USP. His debut album, *In the Lonely Hour*, some of which was written when he was just 18, is the soundtrack to approximately 15m broken hearts (the sales figure for the record as of June). He started training with a jazz pianist when he was eight and much of his childhood was spent in choirs at his Catholic school or local music-theatre rehearsals. By the age of 12, he had a manager. He moved to London at 18 to pursue fame, and worked in a pub where he met the songwriter Jimmy Napes. Through Napes he eventually met the dance duo Disclosure, and together they wrote the megahit *Latch*. A record deal swiftly followed.

Now 26, Smith has seven No1s, four Grammys and an Oscar for *Writing's on the Wall*, the theme to the James Bond film *Spectre*. His fans range from Elton John to Ellen DeGeneres, not to mention the chap in sequined heels and a track-suit waiting outside the Staples Centre in LA, telling me he's been to "every Sam Smith concert in California", or the man who proposed to his girlfriend in the front row in Sacramento, because Smith's music means so much to them. "My first album wasn't only about relationships, it was about being gay and growing up and feeling that

Style **Exclusive**



CASHMERE AND SILK SWEATER, £1,070, HERMES. COTTON TROUSERS, £445, PRADA



MULTICOLOURED WOOL
JUMPER, £395, PAUL
SMITH. JACKET, £359,
AND TROUSERS, £169,
HUGO HUGO BOSS;
MRPORTER.COM



BURGUNDY AND GREY
CASHMERE ROLLNECK,
£790, BRUNELLO CUCINELLI.
YELLOW ASYMMETRIC
SWEATER, £875, LANVIN.
COTTON TROUSERS,
£445, PRADA; MRPORTER.
COM. LEATHER SHOES,
£320, EYTYS



Sam with his band and backing singers pre concert at Valley View Casino Centre, San Diego

THIS PAGE T-SHIRT, £65, SUNSPEL. MARBLE-PRINT COAT, £1,070, DRIES VAN NOTEN. CASHMERE COAT, £4,720, AND STRETCH-COTTON TROUSERS, £520, BRUNELLO CUCINELLI

OPPOSITE SAM WEARS T-SHIRT, AS BEFORE. BLUE GROSGRAIN SUIT, £2,855, ERMENEGILDO ZEGNA





CASHMERE AND SILK SWEATER, £1,070, HERMES. BURGUNDY MOHAIR AND WOOL BLAZER, £2,325, CERRUTI 1881. CASHMERE DOUBLE-BREASTED COAT, £1,690, PAL ZILERI. COTTON TROUSERS, £445, PRADA: MRPORTER.COM

no one understood me, which I think everyone feels,” he says.

Dating, though excellent fodder for Smith’s songwriting, is challenging. “My life from the outside can seem glamorous, but the reality is that I am on tour every other year and I’m never home, and it’s public,” he says. He is currently single; his last, and only public, relationship was an eight-month romance with the American actor Brandon Flynn (star of the Netflix teen drama *13 Reasons Why*), which ended in June. “Brandon was wonderful,” Smith says. “I’m still trying to figure out what I took from that relationship and what it meant to me. It’s still quite raw. All my relationships have ended in a nice way, never nasty.” He wants to keep any other details about Flynn private, though he recognises that “seeing gay relationships [in a public way] is important and refreshing. You don’t see it loads.”

Part of his advocacy for kindness comes from his parents. He grew up with two younger sisters, Mabel, 22, and Lily, 23, his “best friends”. His parents divorced when he was 18. “Everyone was heartbroken, both parties,” he says, “but the amazing and lucky thing is that my parents remained friends. They both have other partners and speak on the phone all the time. They can hang out together. We’re all still a unit in a modern way. Weirdly, my parent’s divorce made me believe in love even more.”

He’s a hopeless romantic. “I love sending flowers, leaving notes around the house and making thoughtful presents. I feel like I’m in a Richard Curtis film all the time. Which is bad, because I think everything should be like a movie and I get anxiety when it’s not.” He’s not on any dating apps; instead, he meets people “out and about”. Or, “under the disco balls”, he adds with a smile. “Right now, the thought of getting into a relationship is too much. I just want to marry my job, work really hard and hopefully, when I’m not looking for [love], it will come.”

Two days later, I join him in San Diego for another sellout show. His core crew — 100 members — travel to every gig, whereupon they meet an additional local crew at the venue to build the set. Smith’s dressing room is decked out identically in each place: teal velvet curtains, rug, sofas, a record player and framed pictures of his friends, family and idols such as Freddie Mercury and Amy Winehouse. Le Labo Santal 33 perfume and scented candles waft through the air and a basket of green vegetables and a NutriBullet sit on a side table, next to an ice bucket of white wine. A pair of black heels are strewn on the floor. “They’re Sam’s,” nods the tour manager, eyes glued to one of his three phones.

Smith’s entourage includes a trainer, chef, vocal coach, make-up artist, photographer, ex-army security guard and whichever friends and family he has flown out. Lily has been with him for the past three weeks. They all have a WhatsApp group he’s not included in. “They seem to have loads of fun on that and I’m not welcome,” he laughs. It’s a working family of camaraderie, in jokes and back slaps. “My managers are amazing, because they’re so good at calming me down,” he says. “I am work



MERINO CARDIGAN WITH PADDED NECK, £295, BELSTAFF. COTTON SHIRT, £315, GIVENCHY

I’m always panicking that everything is going to fail

obsessed. I’m always bouncing off things, coming up with good and stupid ideas, but also always panicking that everything is going to fail.”

Smith is exceptionally hard on himself. He struts around on stage, exuding confidence and flair, clearly in his element. Yet he admits to struggling with self-doubt, constantly feeling he isn’t enough — or isn’t doing enough. But in person, he is irresistibly engaging. Around the dinner table or in his dressing room, no topic, from drag queens to celibacy, is off limits (yet sadly off the record). He’s happy chatting to anyone, letting anyone else be the centre of attention. Writing music has always been an outlet for his insecurities, but five months ago, he started professional therapy. “I find it amazing,” he says. “I never want to complain about fame, it’s such a privilege, but I have to pretend that I know what I’m doing when really I don’t. It’s a mindf***. My biggest fear in life is that I’ll never be satisfied, and therapy helps with that.”

Smith keeps his Twitter and Instagram apps in a



NAVY T-SHIRT, £65,
SUNSPEL. SHIRT,
£790, PRADA. NAVY
TROUSERS, £285,
CASELY-HAYFORD

folder labelled Crack, to remind him how addictive social media is. "Instagram is wonderful, because you get to connect with people. It's an art form, actually. But it's dangerous. Going through a break-up, feeling sad and tender, is something that you should be feeling. You should allow yourself time to heal. But on Instagram, everyone's having a great time, which makes you feel like shit."

Smith's show days start with a sound check at the venue at 5pm, followed by an hour of training: running up the stairs of big arenas or lifting weights. With the help of the British nutritionist Amelia Freer, who has worked with Boy George and James Corden, Smith famously dropped 50lb in 2015 after being unhappy with his weight. He looks incredibly slim. Buff, even. "I can tuck my shirts in now, so I enjoy getting dressed," he smiles. He has fronted a Balenciaga campaign and Givenchy has made clothes for this tour. "I love relaxed wear," he says. "I like things to look classic and feel timeless." His fitness regime is strict. "I need as much routine as possible on tour," he says. "Working out is also a huge part of taking care of my voice." Meals are a lot of salmon and steamed veg. Not many carbs and no acidic foods or dairy.

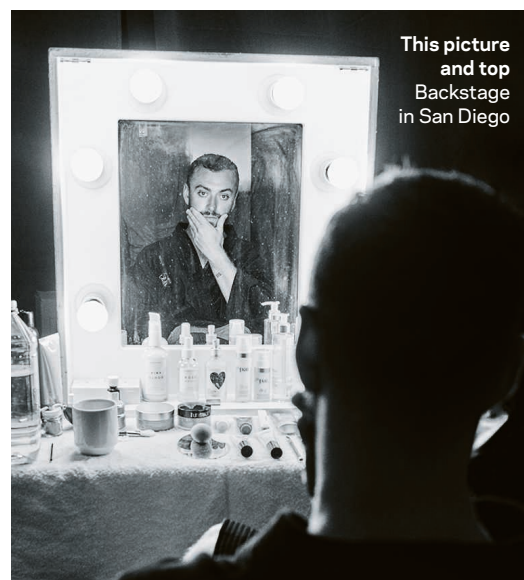
**Feeling sad
and tender
is something
that you
should be
feeling. You
should allow
yourself
time to heal**



"No cooked tomatoes, which is a shame." He performs from 9pm to 11pm, then it's either straight out or straight on the tour bus. "I don't have much of a showbiz life," he says. "In LA, I spend as much time as I can in Malibu by the sea." Plus the occasional hangout with Lady Gaga, or Kesha, who sat behind me at his LA gig ("She texted me to say she was coming. She's a beautiful person") and Calvin Harris, the collaborator on his latest No1, Promises.

Post America, tour dates in South Africa will keep Smith on the road for several more months, but I suspect that if he found the right partner he would throw as much commitment into a relationship as he does his career. He lights up when he talks about monogamy, having kids one day and even his quiet, suburban north London life. "I miss home," he says. "When I'm there I walk on Hampstead Heath, go to pub quizzes and get on the Tube." Then his eyes twinkle. "Sometimes I'll do a bar crawl up Old Compton Street or head down to Vauxhall." Perhaps there are a few thrilling years left in him after all. ■

*The Thrill of It All and Promises are both out now
@samsmith, @scarlettroserrussell*



This picture
and top
Backstage
in San Diego