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introduction

adele worked Sunday shifts at the cafe her auntie ran in Haringey, north London. As the teenager waited tables, the crackly radio announced the countdown of the pop charts. She wondered what it would be like to have her own song in the hit parade. By the time she was 22, she would be at No 1 in charts around the world.

Her influence is immense: she was named the most powerful person in music when she topped the *Guardian's* Music Power 100 list. To put this in context, the mighty Simon Cowell finished third. Adele has sold millions of albums worldwide, won numerous awards, including Grammys and a Brit, and as a result deservedly been crowned queen of the music industry – and all just three years after she released her first single. Along the way she has built a fortune of around £20 million.

It is the authenticity and sincerity of her work that appeals: there are no gimmicks but plenty of soul. With firmly autobiographical lyrics that simply yet powerfully and often painfully speak truths about her personal heartaches, she has touched a nerve with music fans. Speaking as a fan herself, Adele expresses distaste at lazy lyricism. ‘You know, I hate – I’m actually offended by – literal, easy lyrics that have no thought behind them and are purely written because they rhyme,’ she said. Though her higher standards pay off, they come with an emotional price. Remember, for a moment, how songs like ‘Someone like You’ can make you feel: the way they make the hairs on the back of your neck stand up, the way they send a shiver of recognition down your spine, the way they can make your eyes fill with tears and your lips tremble. Now imagine how emotionally draining it is to *perform* those songs night after night on tour.

‘That’s really hard,’ Adele said. She has developed coping mechanisms, including thinking about mundane things as she sings – the furniture store Ikea is one such distracting thought. The challenges of live performances of such material are exceeded by the rewards. ‘Anything I find difficult is completely thrown in the bin when I see how people respond to my music,’ she said. ‘I love it when a wife drags her husband to a show and he’s standing there like a lemon. You spend the whole night trying to win him over and by the end he’s kissing his wife. That’s amazing.’

What a fascinating character Adele is: not least due to the contrast between her musical persona and her everyday personality. Despite the heartbreaking sadness of her music,

Adele remains surprisingly happy and content in her real life. Her raucous, cackling laugh is a catchy and regular feature of her positive and loquacious conversations. Far from discovering a gloomy, self-pitying soul, people who have met her often remark that she laughs more than anyone else. It makes her an attractive personality. When she embarked on the difficult, sometimes soul-destroying tour of American radio and television shows that is required of any overseas artist attempting to 'break the States', she so charmed the industry bigwigs there that as well as wanting to promote her music – 'that decision was a no-brainer for us' said one – they also wanted to go for a drink with her and become her friend.

Her takes on everything from fame to her love life are always diverting. She once recalled how a male fan sent her an unsettling 'crispy tissue' in the post. 'Oh, you sent me a crispy tissue,' she said of the offering. 'I'll definitely get in touch with you! Hey, let's get married and have children!'

Her candour is legendary. Asked when she was typically struck with inspiration to write a new song, she said it usually happened as she got up from her bed to spend a penny in the early hours. She was also asked what she would do if a partner called her fat. 'I'd murder him,' she replied. When she discovered she had won a prestigious Grammy award, she had just returned to her seat from the loo. She had not even done her belt up. Audiences frequently laugh at her on-stage humour, including the dirty jokes. 'What do you call a blonde standing on her head?' she once asked. 'A brunette with bad breath.' Too much information? There is always more where that came from. Explaining why she eschews the social-networking