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Sophie Ellis-Bextor: Posh Bex is back

Ever wondered what pop stars get up to in their spare time? In the case of Sophie Ellis-Bextor the answer is: Buy stuff on eBay.

"There's always a bargain to be had, you know," she enthuses.

"I recently got a very nice 1950s sugar bowl. And one of those supermarket rides for kids where you put 20p in. It's a little train. It was only 35 quid."

But the three years that the singer has spent away from the pop world aren't entirely attributable to her eBay fixation.

Ellis-Bextor says it wasn't so much of question of why take such a long break, as why not.

"It was a bit of an exercise in self-discipline," she says. "For all my impatience, I sort of knew the music was only going to improve if I got the right people to do the right thing: the right producer, the right video directors.

"So I took advantage of the fact that there was no deadline and I wasn't in a hurry."

"Nice to be the baddie"

The infectious electro-pop stylings of her recently-released comeback single, Catch You, contradict its sinister lyrics.

"Basically, it's about stalking," admits Ellis-Bextor. "It's not the first time there's been a song about being so infatuated with someone.

"I think stalking's been the inspiration for a few good pop records, like One Way or Another by Blondie or Every Breath You Take by The Police.

"It's quite nice to be the baddie, although I'm not sure I'd be very good at it. Whenever I like people, I'm not very good at hiding it. I can't really play it that cool so I'm not sure that stalking is my thing."

A new album, her third, follows in May. Ellis-Bextor, in her inimitable understated fashion, describes it as "overall, pretty chipper".

The wide range of collaborators includes Kylie's Can't Get You Out of My Head writer Cathy Dennis, and Fred Schneider of The B-52's, the self-proclaimed world's greatest party band.

"I just wrote a wish-list of people I'd like to work with and he was on it," says Ellis-Bextor. "And we wrote just about the campest song I've ever done, Supersonic.

"It's a love song set in space. So it's full of countdowns and rockets blasting off into space."

Artists still on the wish-list that she would still like to work with include Pet Shop Boys, A-Ha and Jarvis Cocker.

Sophie's choice

If that last name sounds surprising, it shouldn't. Ellis-Bextor has previously worked with the indie-tastic Alex James of Blur and Suede's Bernard Butler.

And before her appearance on 2000's Ibiza anthem Groovejet (If This Ain't Love), she was the singer for short-lived indie hopefuls Theaudience. The band gently nudged their way into the top 40 with a couple of singles in 1998 before, as Ellis-Bextor puts it, they "just kind of imploded".

At which point she considered packing in music altogether. "For a short time it was more that music had given up on me," she says.

"I think I learned quite a big lesson about taking responsibility for what was happening rather than always blaming other people. I realised you can't really live your life getting fed up that other people haven't done what you wanted them to do."

After the success of Groovejet (famously, it kept Victoria Beckham's first solo single off the number one spot), Ellis-Bextor's debut album sold over two million copies and a dazzling pop career was born.

And all this from someone who initially had no ambitions to be a singer. "I sort of did it thinking it would be something good to tell my children," she says. "But then when I started doing it, I actually really liked it."

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