

# CELINE CAIRO

## BIOGRAPHY 2021

Celine Cairo's songs should come with a warning. From first listen, the Dutch seductress reels you in with bewitching vocals and spell-like atmospherics. Delve deeper and poetic depictions of the battle between darkness and light, of nature vanishing from the planet, of womanhood and her own struggles with mental health will have you hopelessly hooked.

Overflow, Celine's spectacular, second album, was written and recorded between London and Amsterdam with the aid of producer Tim Bran (London Grammar, Birdy, Aurora) and upcoming German producer Benjamin Rheinländer. The follow-up to 2016's Free Fall, an award winner streamed more than 10 million times, which broke the former teen star beyond her native Holland, is both beautiful and bleak.

"These are the purest songs I've ever written," says Celine. "They're sad, but also optimistic. If there is a theme to the album, it's about opening up to feelings underneath the surface in order to deal with them; of looking at both the beauty and cruelty of being alive in the eye."

"I've always been an instinctive writer. I don't always know in advance what I want to say. For me, writing is a way to uncover my emotions, to get in touch with my subconscious. Only in retrospect do I know what the song was always going to be about."

While the songs flowed freely, deciding on the sound became a stumbling block until, in London for a writing session in 2018, Celine sent a Facebook message to Bran.

"He was top of my wish list of producers," says Celine. "We'd met once in Amsterdam and I loved what he'd done with London Grammar and Birdy. I was looking for a similar vibe – intimate, yet grand. Someone I could really experiment with, without losing my own identity."

Their first session was a revelation which spawned the song Overflow.

"Overflow opened a door," says Celine. "It's odd, but organic. A bit trip hoppy, with weird chord changes. We had an amazing synergy in the studio and discovered we have very similar taste. From the moment it was written, I felt I had the sound I'd been searching for."

"Lyrically Overflow is about that trip to London, being overwhelmed by the city and its size and the energy I got from being there for the first time. I get this magical high often on writing trips, but of course every high is followed by a low. So it's also a song about ups and downs."

The pair continued to write, both together and remotely, while at Amsterdam's Studio 150, Celine recorded some of the songs she had previously written with her regular band and Rheinländer, including 2020's spectral single Found A Light, about losing herself to despair, but coming back stronger.

"I've always been open about my mental health," says Celine. "I've long been on medication and I'm happy to speak out to break the stigma around that."

"Bi-polar disorder runs in my family and my teenage years were very much shaped by the depression and manic episodes I witnessed. Though I've never been manic, I suffered from depression and anxiety which was really hard, but it's also the reason I started writing songs. It was the only way I knew to get my emotions out and make sense of my life amid the chaos that was going on around me."

Celine's dad, a lawyer who specialised in music, is also an amateur drummer who took Celine to his gigs from the age of four, where she would get up on stage and sing. Her mum, a music lover who played her everything from flamenco and Fado to classical music, inadvertently helped launch her daughter's career when she found a broken guitar in the street one day.

"I'd been playing piano since 8 and singing since 11, but getting that guitar was my gateway to writing songs," says Celine. "My mum knew it was a good guitar, despite being broken and having no strings. For my 14<sup>th</sup> birthday, she had it renovated and that's when I really started writing songs."

"I was lucky to have been born and raised in the heart of Amsterdam, in the historic district, which is very rich in culture and architecture. I grew up going to concerts, galleries and arthouse films – all of which inspired my music."

By 16, Celine was playing local gigs, performing a mix of her own songs and covers. When she got a gig at Amsterdam's legendary Paradiso venue, she brought a bassist and viola player on board and the trio began touring together. They also entered a competition with one of Celine's songs and won. The prize was being flown to the States to perform with other winners at Carnegie Hall.

On return, Celine self-released her first EP. One of its songs became a staple on national radio and the teenager found herself a favourite on Holland's biggest daytime TV show. Around the same time she was accepted to Amsterdam's prestigious Conservatory, but quit halfway through her course to concentrate on her own music.

Her second EP, 2013's *Follow*, was produced by Ninja Tune's Fink, after which Celine began touring internationally. For *Free Fall*, she decamped to L.A. to record with Grammy-nominated producer Bill Lefler (Ingrid Michaelson, Laura Jansen) at his Death Star studio. The acclaimed album won her fans around the world and was playlisted in The Netherlands on Radio 2.

"I still love my debut, but it was the first time I'd been in a big studio and I used almost everything I had to hand," laughs Celine. "I wanted this album to be more organic and this time I really knew what I wanted and how to get there. Nothing had to feel forced."

As ever, Celine's band were key to the recordings. "I do the songwriting and production, then the band come in and sprinkle their magic," says Celine. "They're all really close friends who've been with me for years and although my act bears my name, we really are a band. The production highlights the live sound to make the transition to the stage more natural."

Celine spent two years writing, travelling and immersing herself in nature while waiting for the pieces to fall into place. The album's stunning first single, *Bird Song*, released at the start of this year, captures that period.

"I wrote *Bird Song* with Tim after two full days working on another track," says Celine. "I was super tired, running over London and desperate to get home when he suggested we try writing something else. I couldn't say no. I barely remember the writing, just sounds and feelings, knowing it sounded a bit like a hymn."

"I wrote the lyrics on the spot. Now I can see it's me worrying about the state of nature. The irony is I do a job where I travel and enjoy the perks of that lifestyle, while witnessing the effects of climate change. I remember Amsterdam being greener and having many more birds. I think about how we're losing touch with the natural world a lot."

*Famous*, Celine's latest single, explores an even more modern malaise – our constant craving for attention. Over sonorous piano, airy acoustic guitar and ghostly electronics, she dissects a world warped by social media.

"It feels today as though everyone is trying to be famous," she says Celine. "Thanks to technology, we can sell ourselves as we want to be seen. We promote perfection rather than reality, in a quest for the recognition we all now believe we deserve."

"I'm not immune to that myself, which is something I've struggled with. As a musician I need to be seen and be heard. To make a living, you can't stay off social media, however negatively it impacts you."

The Tori Amos-esque *Pirouettes* paints a picture of a couple entranced with each other who may not last until morning, their dancing mimicked in the movement of the melody. The spooky *The Fire* deals with womanhood and what Celine's depression has taught her.

"Patience," she says. "To wait for the flame to come back to me instead of chasing it. What you lack when you're depressed is perspective. I've learned to keep going, no matter how I feel. Keep doing the work and the fire I need to fuel me always eventually returns."

*Holy War* was inspired by a friend's bad break-up, but could apply to any couple losing touch with each other. *The Fall* is an ode to flip sides – for everything good there's a price to pay, a sentiment Celine applies to her quest to make the best music possible.

The last track recorded for the album is the sweetest. *As Long As You Love Me* is a rare Celine love song. "Well, sort of a love song," she says. "It's about me trying to conquer the world, but knowing that I have a wonderful partner to come home to, which makes such a difference."

"It's an epic song I can imagine performing with an orchestra. I long for an orchestra! First I'll see how the album does and when we're finally allowed to tour again maybe I'll indulge myself."

**New single 'Famous' will be released on February 26<sup>th</sup>**

**The album *Overflow* will be released in June on Ivy Records**