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Summer Of Saweetie: The Rapper Talks Rising To Fame And Dreams Of Becoming A 'Global Mogul'



"Hopefully when women see what I wear, what I talk about, it empowers them to be comfortable in their own skin, and empowers them to talk about what they want to talk about as long as it's not disrespecting or hurting anyone else," says Saweetie. JERRITT CLARK/CETTY IMAGES FOR WARNER BROS. RECORDS

Whether summer 2021 will be as wild as people predict remains unclear. One thing's for certain: it's the summer of Saweetie.

The LA-based rapper's star has soared during lockdown: At the beginning of 2020, Saweetie had 6.3 million Instagram followers. Today, she has 11.8 million. A whopping 20.6 million Spotify users tuned into Saweetie in May, making her about as popular as her ex-boyfriend's hip-hop group, Migos. Perhaps most notably, the 27-year-old has achieved this without releasing a full album. And she's not slowing down: She drops her first EP, *Pretty B*tch Music*, later this summer. After that, she'll launch her Icy Baby Foundation, through which she, and her grandmother cofounder, aim to improve the financial literacy of Black and Brown youth. But she won't be satisfied until her bank statement has three commas.

"I want to be a global mogul," says the *Forbes* Under 30 alum. "Eventually, I want to see my brand supersede Saweetie."

Her brand, Icy, sells clothing inspired by her lyrics, like \$100 terry cloth sweatpants emblazoned with the line "rich with no day job" from her breakout single, "Tap In."

"I'm just really excited to take over," she says. "What's great about me dominating is that I'm very inclusive and love to share my light and help other people out."

Born Diamonte Harper and nicknamed Saweetie by her grandmother, she began writing poems and setting them to music at 13. But she kept her hobby secret from family—even her grandfather, San Francisco 49's linebacker Willie Harper, and uncle, MC Hammer—channeling her energy into academia and enrolling in San Diego State University at age 17 to study psychology, theater and communication, according to *W*. During her sophomore year, she transferred to the University of Southern California to study communications and business at the famed Annenberg School. As a senior, she started sharing videos of her rapping in her car on Instagram because she couldn't afford studio time. One of these videos, featuring her rapping over Khia's "My Neck, My Back (Lick It)," caught the attention of Artistry Group CEO Max Gousse. Later that year, Warner Brothers signed her and dropped her first single, "Icy Girl," on October 2, 2017.

Since then, "Icy Girl" has gone RIAA-certified Platinum. Her subsequent quarantine-era singles "My Type," "Tap In" and "Best Friend" have been certified Gold and Platinum (the latter is currently number 37 on Spotify's U.S. Top 50 chart.)

Forbes spoke with the singer about her career and dreams of ascending to Rihanna-level fame and fortune.

Alexandra Sternlicht: Going back to your early days, how did your time at San Diego State University and University of Southern California shape your entrepreneurial endeavors and career?

Saweetie: College taught me how to think. It taught me how to be an adult. It taught me to be accountable for the good, the bad, the ugly, the success.

Sternlicht: How has your family influenced the person you are today?

Saweetie: I don't know what kind of woman I'd be without my family. They make me feel normal. I take the success day-by-day, but people look at me as a celebrity. I don't feel like a celebrity, to be honest, but my family just makes me feel normal.

Sternlicht: If you weren't a rapper, what would you be?

Saweetie: I'd be Olivia Pope.

My goal is to create a strong business foundation—not something that's just for clout or publicity—but a working machine that will last for decades to come.

Saweetie

Sternlicht: You're Black, Filipino and Chinese. How has your background shaped you?

Saweetie: At an early age, I struggled with identifying who I was, because it's two different families, two different sets of rules, two different cultures. But respect is something that both of my families hold with pride. It gave me a bigger perspective of what to expect from the world.

Sternlicht: Has being in the spotlight affected your everyday life and relationships?

Saweetie: Honestly, fame is interesting. It's a double-edged sword. I'm appreciative of all this fame; however, it's like I'm under a microscope. It's something I'm slowly gauging but I'm grateful for the love and support my fans give me so I try not to complain because I realize it comes with the territory.

Sternlicht: Speaking of fans, rising to prominence during the pandemic, you've not been able to have concerts and interact with fans face-to-face. What's it like to emerge on the other side as a celebrity?

Saweetie: I'm a homebody. I flourish the most when I'm at home. Quarantine gave me the time to both think and execute before the world was able to take a breath. It gave me the chance to get back to my creative roots. Through content and creativity we were able to make the brand bigger.



Saweetie performs at the 2019 BET Hip Hop Awards in October of 2019. AARON J. THORNTON/WIREIMAGE

Sternlicht: What is your mission with Icy?

Saweezie: My goal is to create a strong business foundation—not something that’s just for clout or publicity—but a working machine that will last for decades to come. I want my great grandkids running the Icy business.

Sternlicht: What part of the business has been the most successful so far?

Saweezie: Partnerships have been a great way to blend music, fashion and beauty. And I make music that goes great with campaign ads.

Sternlicht: Your brand is really all about female empowerment. What do you think women need to be doing to maximize their status in the world?

Saweezie: Networking. As women, we’re shielded, but I think it’s important for women to network and make a name for themselves by forming their own personal relationships. That’s something I learned this past year, and that’s why I love talking to the owners of brands I’m doing partnerships with. I’m a very direct person.

Sternlicht: Tell me about your philanthropic endeavors.

Saweezie: Me and my grandma were inspired during quarantine. Everyone in the world witnessed the Black Lives Matter movement. I hate calling it a movement, because for many of us, it’s a lifestyle. I’ve seen my dad and uncles experience so many injustices. It’s important I’m involved in my communities as much as possible.

Sternlicht: What initiatives are you working on through your foundation?

Saweezie: My grandma’s biggest thing is teaching financial literacy to low-income Black and Brown communities. She’s working on a rollout, and I think we’ll be official in late August or September.

Sternlicht: As the world returns to normal, what are you looking forward to most?

Sweetie: The social interaction of concerts and being outside. In quarantine, I realized that though I'm a homebody, I'm also a social creature. Being able to see faces other than the one in the mirror and my team's'. It's so simple, but social interaction.