

# All about the girl

She's got the pipes, the looks and now, a tour alongside R'n'B diva Beyoncé, but talented Darwin singer/songwriter Jessica Mauboy's just getting started

STORY RACHEL SMITH

Jessica wears:  
Nicola Finetti silk dress;  
Samantha Wills brass/  
wood bangle.



The curtain around the makeshift changing cubicle twitches. Jessica Mauboy's behind it and, outside, the crew for today's photoshoot bustle around the room, tweaking this, arranging that. On a sideboard in the corner, rows of super-high stilettos lie in wait. Designer gowns worth thousands of dollars sway together in vivid hues of pinks, purples, greens and reds. One final twitch and Mauboy emerges, a shy smile at the ready.

Barefaced, with her long hair pulled into a ponytail, the pint-size songstress is more

girl-next-door than fashion plate. There's zero attitude; she's friendly to everyone before being whisked into the sanctuary of the hair and make-up chair. An hour later, all smoky eyes, tousled waves and golden skin, she pours her curves into a purple Aurelio Costarella dress, slips on a pair of towering Gucci heels and submits to the photographer's directives with the ease of a pro.

"I don't count, but I've done a lot of shoots – in the past few years, more than 50, definitely," recalls the 20-year-old, casually leaning on a studio prop. So exotically beautiful is she,

it's hardly surprising no one in the room can take their eyes off her.

As she turns this way and that, grooves to the background beats and laughs as she yanks up a gown that's speedily dipping towards indecency, you get the sense that, for her, this is all a game of dress-ups, not too far from her Darwin days, growing up with four sisters. "We'd get all dolled up, stand in front of the mirror and sing Spice Girls songs," remembers Mauboy, whose passion for music started when she was a little girl. "At three years old, I used to sit in front of the TV >

and sing along to all the commercials. My parents saw that passion and supported it. They knew music would be a big part of my life."

The glamorous side of self-promotion was unexpected – but not unwelcome, Mauboy hastily adds – and she says she still feels strange spotting herself in the magazines she grew up reading. "All I ever wanted to do was sing, to write with other musos and perform, so this side of it is a little crazy," she says.

It's the perfect word to describe the past three years for the 2006 *Australian Idol* runner-up. She's co-written her first album and made her acting debut alongside Geoffrey Rush, Deborah Mailman and Missy Higgins in the upcoming Aussie film *Bran Nue Dae*, which debuted at the Melbourne International Film Festival in June. An Indonesian Youth Ambassador (her father has a Timorese-Indonesian background, her mother is Aboriginal), Mauboy also works with indigenous organisations and communities, including a NAIDOC (National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee) initiative promoting youth empowerment and education.

But it's in her original forum that she's making phenomenal progress. After collaborating with rapper Flo Rida for her hit single 'Running Back', she'll support him on tour next month, which will serve as a warm up to her next big commitment – the highly coveted support act gig on Beyoncé's upcoming Australian tour.

"That's the ultimate so far. I'll be hanging out with Beyoncé for a whole month. To see how it all happens – how she works, how she puts her show together – will be amazing."

Perhaps the biggest changes for Mauboy, though, have been personal: leaving home, becoming independent and carving out a life and career she'd long dreamt of but never believed she'd achieve. It's also been a time of dealing with the past, which is evident when listening to her platinum-selling debut album, *Been Waiting*.

"The majority of the songs on my album are about a past relationship," she confesses. "My ex-boyfriend knows it's about him – we don't talk much, but I rang him up and said, 'Please, don't freak out or feel bad or anything. This is just what I felt at the time.' He was fine about it, really cool. Those songs tell a story of my life and I was able to be as free as possible – it was kind of like closure. It helped me heal and be happy on my own. After that [break-up], I went through a time where I was still growing and processing everything that was going on, travelling and being on my own."

Now, though, Mauboy is smitten with a new love. In stark contrast to the parade of blokes constantly approaching her, 20-year-old Themeli

Magripilis was blissfully unaware of Mauboy – until she introduced herself during a night out with friends.

"It was so random, how we got together. Obviously, coming off the TV and everyone knowing me, it was always about other people introducing themselves to me, so I wanted to turn that around. I was out with the girls, we were having fun and I spotted him. We'd never met, but I thought he looked friendly, so I went over to say hi," she says. "After that, we became close, we started texting and talking to each other all the time, and now we've been together seven months."

The couple don't see each other often, as Mauboy is based in Sydney and Magripilis, who works in his family's building business, lives in Darwin. But they're talking about living together in the future and Mauboy hopes to lure her boy to the big smoke. "Coming from a small town myself, I know how it feels to be pushed into a big city; it's a totally different life,"

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she admits. "But we talk about it; it's probably not too far off. We're very open and the more we are, the closer we get."

So can you take the small town out of the girl? In Mauboy's case, yes. Even at the tender age of 20, when many of her friends are still living at home or backpacking, she plans to put down roots by buying her own apartment in Sydney. "Darwin is my first base, Sydney is my second base, and everywhere else is just suitcase living," she jokes. "It's weird, being so young and having my own place. I'm working so much, I'm really never there. I'd love to decorate, but I haven't had time; it's pretty much white walls, carpet and a bed. I haven't even bought nice sheets yet!"

Non-stop commitments don't leave much time for friends, either, but Mauboy is used to that. "I grew up in the spotlight; before *Idol*, I was always travelling to talent quests and my friends were constantly ringing me and saying, 'Where are you now?'" These days, they ring her to chat – and keep her updated on which magazines she's appeared in.

"Sometimes there are things I haven't said or stories I don't know about, which is a bit weird, but I let it flow over me," she shrugs. "I'm a pretty chilled-out person. In the music industry, where everything's so crazy, I think that's the best way to be."

Such nonchalance is, you might suspect, partly the secret to her post-*Idol* success – especially given that so many other promising contestants fade into the background. Mauboy believes it's all about confidence. "Watching the past *Idols* grow, there's a lot of fear. I think you have to accept that you're a product and you have to sell yourself. That's hard for a lot of people to deal with. But it starts from the inside; being comfortable and believing in the musical direction you want to go."

As the stylist waves the next outfit at the singer, including a pair of stilettos even higher than the last, Mauboy grins and nods – duty calls. "I love those dresses," she confides, picking quickly at the chicken wrap and

salad on her plate. "I'm a huge fan of Nicola Finetti, Collette Dinnigan, Rachel Gilbert. People are already asking if they can fit me for the ARIA Awards in November." She pauses and smiles, adding quietly, "But you know, while it's great being made up, and getting to wear these gorgeous clothes, I actually feel most beautiful when I'm comfortable – in my jeans and Havaianas."

It'll no doubt be jeans all the way as Mauboy boards the plane to Darwin tonight to enjoy some downtime with her boyfriend and family before she goes on tour. But, right now, as she waves and pads barefoot back to the change room, this rising young star is more than happy to strap on the shoes, smile and strike a pose. **SM**

For information on tour dates, visit [www.jessicamauboy.com.au](http://www.jessicamauboy.com.au). Turn the page to see Jessica Mauboy model this week's fashion. For more, check out the behind-the-scenes footage from our photoshoot at [www.news.com.au/dailytelegraph](http://www.news.com.au/dailytelegraph).