

FEATURE

# NAÏKA RICHARD

Interview & text by: Katharina Weiß  
Photography by: Steven Lüdtker

I have to be honest: the first time I typed the name of US artist Naïka into Google and saw a picture from the video for her song „Ride“, I thought: Ok, just another half-naked girl singing about shaking her booty on the dance floor. But then I played it and the cute clip really made me smile. The song immediately got stuck in my head and stayed there for the rest of the day.

Besides being well manufactured pop, Naïka slips some unusual twists into her feel-good lyrics „No cheap philosophy / Don't need designer dreams / It's all a lot of shit to me.“ The singer has lived on four different continents and her sound is marked by a variety of different influences. Despite seeing many wonders of the world though, the Berlin experience has been new to her. We meet up with Naïka in the empty Universal Music Group building in Friedrichshain. It's a national holiday and since all of the employees aren't there we start enjoying ourselves in the unique space just like a bunch of kids who have been left home alone for the very first time.

A Uniting Sound  
All that is missing is a flower in her hair to give her the perfect hippie flair; Miami-based singer Naïka Richard wants to add more color to her favorite thing in the world: Pop music. We spent a day with Naïka at an unusual urban playground and spoke about her mission.

Naïka is a girl other girls like. Even though she is hauntingly beautiful and blessed with an incredible voice, she is free of pretension and seemingly doesn't have a boring bone in her body. Her calm sense of humor makes it easy to laugh along with and her work ethic is impressive for a 22-year-old newcomer. During our shoot on top of the roof of the building, the photographer asks Naïka if she could take off her jacket to have a better contrast against the dark Berlin skyline. There I am, freezing in my thick winter coat, as she poses in her white crop top without uttering a single complaint.

We dance and sing along to Beyoncé to keep warm and later move down to the lobby to bask in the simple delight of trying each of Universals swings with huge smiles on our faces. Naïka might not be the biggest signed artist at Universal yet-but she for sure is the only one who's used their headquarters as her personal playground...

Katharina:

Would you rather be more attractive or more charismatic?

Naïka:

Charismatic. A person that's just attractive can keep you very bored. Charm goes beyond that. It gets to your soul.

Katharina:

If you could be minister of education for a day, what would you change about music education in schools?

Naïka:

I would impose it. How does the world work without music? People often don't take music education seriously enough. To be creative in a musical way activates certain areas in your brain, which can also be used for other skills. And it's healing.







“  
My favorite  
English words  
are: Laughter,  
love, happiness.  
God, I'm such a  
cheesy person.  
”

Katharina:  
What are your three favorite  
words in the English  
language?

Naïka:  
Laughter, love, happiness.  
God, I'm such a cheesy  
person.

Katharina:  
What other languages do you  
speak?

Naïka:  
English and French are my  
first languages and I speak  
Haitian Creole and a little bit  
of Spanish. My mum is from  
Haiti, so I grew up with  
Caribbean music playing  
around the house.

Katharina:  
That explains why you covered

an old Haitian song, „Papa  
Gede / Bel Gason“-a clip that  
has over half a million views  
on your Facebook page.

Naïka:  
The reactions were amazing. It  
is a song that everyone forgot  
about and it was so much fun  
bringing it back.

Katharina:  
While English is the  
dominating language in  
popular cultural, non-white  
languages and sound  
influences are often  
neglected...

Naïka:  
I want to change that. Every  
culture and heritage should be  
glorified and valued. We  
should learn from each other's  
histories and respect them. I  
don't understand this

separation that's going on. I  
never understood how we can  
be this way, so full of fear  
instead of embracing our  
differences.

Katharina:  
You wrote a song about a  
Syrian child-what inspired you  
to write about someone so far  
away?

Naïka:  
I came across this video,  
where I could see this little  
boy. His home had just  
crumbled, and he was taken to  
the hospital but his whole  
family had died after being hit  
by a bomb in Aleppo. I  
want to cry just thinking about  
it now. I recognized once  
again, that in the country  
where I live we all exist in  
this little bubble. And we see  
videos like that on the news,

thinking it's something very far away. I don't think we realize that this stuff is happening in our world and that we have the power to stop it. We are powerful enough to make a difference. Just watching it and saying „Oh so sad!“ before moving on is not enough. We have to help each other, I want to bring awareness to the fact that not everyone has the same privileges as we do. Writing songs like this is my way of trying to change things.

Katharina:

Is there a song that really changed you?

Naïka:

Michael Jackson's „We are the World“ and „One Love“ by Bob Marley. Always. I also like a more recent one, „Chained to the Rhythm“ by Katy Perry. I really felt impacted by that song, I actually wish I wrote it.

Katharina:

Speaking about songwriting, do you write all of your songs on your own?

Naïka:

Yes, definitely. I want to be involved in all of my music. I feel then it's much more personal and that connection is very important to me. The only song I didn't write on my own is „Call me Marilyn“. A good friend from Berklee College of Music in Boston, where I went to school, pitched it to me.

