

A word with Sophie Ellis-Bextor



Ten years after releasing the UK's most-played song of the past decade, the pop diva tells **Rob Garratt** about album number four, baby number three and her love of social networking

Sophie Ellis-Bextor is pregnant – and she's doesn't care who knows about it. While many mothers-to-be might prefer to guard such precious news among friends and family, the singer chose to announce that baby number three was on the way to the world – via Twitter.

Despite a blooming bump, morning sickness and whatever nasty nuances come with carrying an extra person around, the star will still be giving a full show at Dubai's Burj Park next Thursday December 1. 'I'm one of the lucky ones,' she says. 'I work lots and I work hard, but I've always had a family. I'm fortunate that my work isn't work, it's a passion. I'm 32, I'm too young to retire, and I love it far too much.'

The forthcoming birth (due in the spring) is not the first intimate detail the British star has willingly broadcast to her 50,000 followers. Other recent posts include the news that she had just given blood for the first time ('shameful') and that her husband – Richard Jones, bassist with pop band The Feeling – had offered to buy her a kebab (#itmustbelove').

Online, Ellis-Bextor paints a very happy-go-lucky picture of her life. At times the glib anecdotes and jokey asides even feel ditsy coming from the keys of a pop princess known as much for her looks as her music (she models alongside Kate Moss for make-up brand Rimmel). But within minutes of talking to her, it becomes clear she's a very savvy, smooth operator. She is proud of her frank and open relationship with the Twittersphere – the regular updates are a way of charging through the PR infrastructure that stands between artists and their fans – but it is clearly her who is firmly in the driving seat.

'You become a politician in your own world,' she says. 'Twitter is for a little amusement, a way to show you have a life, that you are a creative individual making your own decisions. But there's things I wouldn't do. The test is how you sleep at night – and I sleep fine.'

This dance-pop diva is used to life in front of a public lens. The daughter of *Blue Peter* presenter Janet Ellis, she featured on the British kids' TV show several times growing up. By the

age of 18 she was lead singer of indie band Theaudience, who enjoyed three UK chart singles, and at 19 she recorded with Welsh stadium-fillers Manic Street Preachers.

But it was a break at 21 that changed the young singer's life forever. She added a vocal to an

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instrumental club tune by Italian DJ Spiller. The resulting track, 'Groovejet (If This Ain't Love)', beat former Spice Girl Victoria Beckham's first solo single to the UK number-one spot, was reportedly the first song ever to be played on an iPod, and was recently named the most-played song on UK radio in the past decade.

It was the beginning of a heyday: follow-up singles 'Take Me Home'

and 'Murder on the Dancefloor' cemented Ellis-Bextor's status as a dance-pop icon, and she enjoyed three consecutive Brit Awards nominations for Best Female Solo Artist in 2002, 2003 and 2004.

The glory years ended after album number two, when Ellis-Bextor took time out to get married to Jones and have children. Six years on and the pair appear to be the model celebrity couple, helping each other write songs between changing nappies and cooking dinner. 'Like any couple, we share things,' she explains of the writing process. 'If I want a bit of feedback, he has really insightful suggestions... it's really useful having someone else musical just there.'

The singer is currently promoting album number four, this year's *Make a Scene*, which pits her vocals with a string of in-demand writer-producers including Freemasons, Metronomy and Armin Van Buuren. The record has a seductive retro-chic feel – could it be a cynical attempt to recapture the feel of her early breakthrough singles? 'I guess the retro sound comes from me,' she ponders. 'It wasn't anything to do with anything except making an album that I would want to listen to.'

Thursday's show at Burj Park will be Ellis-Bextor's first visit to Dubai, but she has fond memories of performing two sets at last year's Abu Dhabi Grand Prix. 'It was fantastic – I've never played in a race track before and it was pretty extraordinary,' she adds. 'This time I'm hoping people can show us round all the good bits of the city. I'm expecting a lot of sun in December, so I can go home being smug.'

Sophie Ellis-Bextor plays at Burj Park, Downtown Dubai on December 1. Tickets Dhs199-Dhs599, available at www.timeouttickets.com

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