

With Taylor Swift and Charli XCX for fans, BØRNS is forging his own, oddly uncompromising, pop path. And all from a lonely treehouse in LA.



Photographer Gabriela Celeste

"I give a lot of props to models. I'm not naturally one of those..." Musician Garrett Borns, AKA BØRNS, is talking about his *Rollacoaster* shoot. The softly-spoken Michigan native is trying to explain why he is such a confident stage performer – this is a man unafraid of neon, sequins or fringing – but comes over a little bashful in a photographer's studio.

"I think it's because I like being in control. I have a pretty distinct vision." That vision, he says, "is kind of theatrical. It's my way of catching people's attention. 'Hey, look, something sparkly!'"

The 23-year-old released a debut EP, "Candy", in late 2014, as a teaser to his forthcoming album. His Marc Bolan-esque falsetto and quirky pop sensibilities quickly garnered high profile admirers: Taylor Swift tweeted that single "Electric Love" "sounds like an instant classic" (and engaged Borns in a direct messaging thread which leaked all over the internet); Charli XCX then booked him as backup on her upcoming US summer tour.

Like Swift and XCX before him, Borns has a radio-ready shimmer to his music. This may have something to do with the songs that were on loop in his childhood: "I grew up with whatever my folks were listening to – Fleetwood Mac, Bee Gees, Earth, Wind and Fire, disco stuff. Music that has a rhythm and a groove."

Despite this, Borns is cautious to cite such bands as influences. "I do like a lot of sixties and seventies British rock and glam rock. But I don't want to do anything that sounds too throwback. I want the delivery to sound new."

In this quest for newness, a few years ago Borns made the move from New York to LA. "I love the pace of New York, but I felt a little confined there. I was jumping around, couchsurfing in Harlem and Bushwick." In contrast, "LA is much more relaxed." Much has been made in early press of Borns' first California abode – an Airbnb treehouse. He laughs, trying to explain what arboreal living is like. "Yeah, well, the tree house was very rustic, it was deteriorating... and it was very chill. But I moved out recently. I now have a place with a bathroom and a kitchen."

Feeling anchored to a home seems to be important to his music-making. "On tour, I don't write like I would at home. I collect ideas for songs while on the road, it gives me stories, but I don't really write much. I do that when I get home and I've sifted through everything."

That said, he is spending increasing time on the road. "The past year is the first time I went on a five week tour, which was educational. It's like a new animal each night – every audience is different, so you have to pick up on their mood and hope it chimes with yours."

For now though, Borns is "in studio mode, hibernating. The album is due out in the fall." He won't be drawn on the details, or potential collaborators, only to say, "I don't want to ruin the surprise... it's top secret. All I can say is it'll be fun to listen to."

Words Olivia Gagan

LEFT Camel wool coat and navy cotton t-shirt both by A.P.C.
RIGHT Black shearling coat by COACH

Fashion Yohana Lebas, fashion assistant Malcolm Mammone

