

NOMINEE

07

MIINK

PAGE 20

'HE'S AN INCREDIBLE SINGER. HE'S A GREAT WRITER. HE'S A BRILLIANT PRODUCER' — JAMES LAVELLE

LONG PREFERRING TO AVOID THE STAGE, MIINK HAS ALWAYS CONSIDERED MUSIC A DEEPLY PERSONAL AFFAIR. BUT FANS OF THE SINGER AND PRODUCER ARE REFUSING TO LET HIM STAY IN THE STUDIO.

"Some artists focus on making songs that get a reaction in the club. Or there's this whole thing of having a festival crowd go absolutely nuts," muses the tall twenty-something with the long, thin hair plaits and gleaming, gold-capped teeth sitting in a West London café.

Meet Miink – one of the most intriguing new artists in Britain. A sensitive, smart and naturally contrary soul who rises at 5am every day to walk his dog, he writes and records all of his music in his bedroom and admits to not even understanding the point of performing live until rather recently.

"That's great. But I don't really like festivals. And I hate clubs. Some people just don't want that type of thing," he says. "I focus on those other times when you listen to music, when you want it to be a bit more of a personal experience."

But even if you're all by yourself, you won't be alone: his beguiling debut mixtape *Small Clan* has already racked up streaming numbers into the millions. With a growing fanbase and gig offers pouring in from all over the world – he's just back from China – Miink is a rapidly rising artist who writes enveloping electronic pop, hip-hop and R&B compositions that he aptly characterizes as "alone music." Lush comfort zones of sound full of starry melodies, softly throbbing beats that feel like they've been recorded buried under a pile of pillows, and yearning vocals sung in the sweetest of falsettos. Songs so intimate they almost make you feel like you're intruding by listening to them.

Miink's personal bond with music is shaped in large part by his upbringing in a huge Jamaican

family in West London. Some of his first childhood memories are of his uncle, a professional musician, working in his studio at the top of his grandmother's townhouse. "I always would hear music being made up there as I was running around," he remembers. "I wasn't allowed to go in. It was like a game trying to get in."

His uncle's band was a household name worldwide, selling millions of records in the 1980s, but he prefers not to be associated with them. "I don't really feel like it has anything to do with my sound, with anything that I'm doing," he explains. "New music should be discovered by new people who want to get into something different, not something from the past."

But Miink credits his uncle with giving him enough access to his studio to pique his interest in music making, keeping him from "doing stupid stuff" that the other neighborhood kids were.

"I don't have many friends from my childhood left because they're all dead or in jail to be honest," he reveals quite bluntly. "I think I've used music as an escape more than anything. It's kept me out of trouble." As has his mother, he acknowledges. "She kept me in check," he says laughing. "Strict Jamaican parent."

Music could easily have remained something sealed off and secretive for Miink – literally "alone music" just for him. But a series of buzz-generating, self-released tracks and production work for other artists including his friend Elliott Power made his name ring out. Giggling, as already touched upon, was a concept that felt alien to Miink for a long time, as someone who has never really been comfortable among crowds and is a perfectionist about his work.

PAGE 21



**'AS FAR AS HIS SONICS
AND PRODUCTION ...
HE'S THE ULTIMATE
ONE-MAN BAND'
— JAMES LAVELLE**

"I never really had much of a live music upbringing," he reasons. "Now I really get it. Yeah, okay, the record is perfect, but the performance is truth. And people just want to see that honesty. They want to see that you are for real."

Realness is everything to Miink, who is fastidious about managing every aspect of his craft, from the minor details of the way his music sounds to the look of his striking photographs and the atmosphere of his videos. He's had talks with major record labels in the past and doesn't rule out one

day signing a deal. But for now, he prefers to remain in full control, and little wonder considering how much success he has enjoyed bringing his music to the world from the sanctuary of his own bedroom.

"You're always pushed down certain avenues growing up," he considers. "But I wanted to do my own thing. There's gotta be loads of people like I was out there. Just waiting for the right thing to hit them."

SELECTED BY JAMES LAVELLE

SELECTED BY JAMES LAVELLE

09

NOMINEE

FRAN
LOBO_

FRAN LOBO CREATES MOODY, ATMOSPHERIC SOUNDSCAPES AS A SOLO VOCALIST, BUT THE LONDON-BASED SINGER ALSO THRIVES AMID THE COLLECTIVE UPLIFT OF CHORAL SINGING.

A former car park converted into a colorful, seven-floor sprawl of studios, exhibition rooms and performance spaces seems an apt place to find soul-pop polymath Fran Lobo. A singer, songwriter, producer, sessions vocalist, DJ, choir leader, music workshop facilitator and installation artist – her career functions on a lot of levels.

It all started, somewhat surprisingly, with classic rock. "I've always been a fan of the music my dad's really into, like Queen and Creedence Clearwater Revival, Led Zeppelin," Lobo says with a smile. "I grew up loving rock music and just having this thing inside me that I really want to be flamboyant and perform."

Finding herself as a musician has been a gradual but true process for the North Londoner. After dabbling with a rock band, she also experimented with acoustic guitar-led indie-folk before honing the signature sound of her solo output: a dark, moody, atmospheric strain of future soul, triphop and drum'n'bass that, like much about Lobo, knows few boundaries. Standouts among several singles released to date include "High" – a hypnotic haze of metallic beats and mantra-like chanting that sounds as if its all been recorded in a cave of reverb – and "War," which could be a battle cry produced by Roni Size.

Her list of influences is wildly diverse: everything from Amy Winehouse to My Bloody Valentine with some Brandy and Monica thrown in for good measure. "The Smiths basically represent a whole part my life," Lobo reveals. "At uni I had a little car and me and a friend used to play *The Queen Is Dead* on repeat. Really loud, driving around, analyzing all the lyrics."

Holding the whole unlikely blend together is Lobo's voice: a pure and supple instrument that could conquer just about any style. With a five-track EP and her debut album ready for release in

2020, Lobo is on the brink of a bold and hopefully game-changing new phase of her career. "I went really in on the production ... and went down a massive rabbit hole," she says proudly. "I worked a lot with Andy Ramsay from Stereolab in his studio, Press Play."

Releasing fresh material will be a triumphant way of moving on from the last couple of years, which, while productive, hasn't been without its challenges. The biggest among them: losing her voice. "I just hadn't thought about the fact that my voice was getting used a lot," she reflects. "And I also went to a gig where I screamed at the top of my voice – Massive Attack at Hyde Park. I sounded like an alien, it was really horrible." She couldn't sing properly for months. It took sessions with a vocal expert to recover.

But instead of becoming discouraged by the scary episode, she chose to use it as inspiration for *Voicescolourmotion* – a critically acclaimed interactive sound and light installation celebrating the power and vulnerability of the human voice. The work was staged at the storied Snape Maltings cultural center on England's eastern coast in summer 2019. "For me that was a big experience," says Lobo. "For the first time I was part of a different world, the art world."

Another key step in her development as an artist has been performing at major festivals around Europe for the revered British musical collective UNKLE. "All of us in the band just get on incredibly well, it was an amazing experience," Lobo says. It was then that she met UNKLE's fulcrum and Shure24 curator James Lavelle, who selected Lobo for her "eclectic" talent and "hardcore" dedication.

**'SHE HAS AN
INCREDIBLE CRAFT TO
THE WAY SHE WORKS'
— JAMES LAVELLE**

PAGE 26

Both her foray into the art world and singing for UNKLE in front of huge crowds in places like Istanbul, Madrid and Moscow have been important confidence-building experiences encouraging her to start a brand-new chapter of her solo career.

But one thing Lobo really seems to have drawn strength from as a musician is her love of choral singing. Since doing a traineeship with a charity called Spitalfields Music in 2015, she's been involved with choirs of all kinds – from a group for over-60s to the all-female Deepthroat Choir and the Goldsmiths Vocal Ensemble. "I just really like the family,

the community of it," Lobo explains. "That's true of anything I do in my life. Maybe it's because of my upbringing."

As a multi-disciplinary creative pushing forward on a broad front, it's easy to imagine a variety of exciting futures for Lobo. What does she make of the argument that says: pick one thing and do it better than anyone else?

"Yeah," she ponders for a second, gazing out over the London skyline. "I'd just get bored," she says with a shrug. "I don't want to be boxed in."

SELECTED BY JAMES LAVELLE

11

PAGE 28

NOMINEE

SKINNY
PELEMBE_

SELECTED BY JAMES LAVELLE

MANY ARTISTS ARE DREAMERS, BUT SKINNY PELEMBE OFTEN RELIES ON NIGHTTIME INSPIRATION TO FASHION HIS ETHEREAL, ELECTRONIC-INFUSED SONGS.

The singer, songwriter and multi-instrumentalist born in South Africa as Doya Beardmore is never troubled by writer's block for one simple reason: whenever he runs into trouble, he just goes to bed.

"I try to write through dreams," is how he explains his unconventional method for penning lyrics. "I'll make the music first, and then I'll sleep with it on. I keep a dream journal and a lot of my lyrics are basically taken directly from that. It's like sitting in a room, watching my own thoughts."

The best part about tapping into his deep subconscious for inspiration this way? He can literally do it lying down. "Poetic as any of this may sound," Beardmore says with a laugh, "it's also lazy! These thoughts are already there, eight hours a day, why not capitalize on them?"

Soft-spoken with a broad South Yorkshire accent after moving to England when he was three years old, he is sitting with a bag of vinyl records at his feet in a burger restaurant near the studios of Soho Radio. Beardmore has just finished his regular show spinning tunes on the independent online station. Signed to Gilles Peterson's label Brownswood Recordings and championed by, among others, garage rock legend Iggy Pop on his BBC Radio 6 Music show, the Doncaster-raised musician is catching the ears of some of the most influential people in the business.

A vivid, hazy collage of dubby beats, shoegaze textures and polyrhythmic guitar riffs, Skinny Pelembe's debut album *Dreaming Is Dead Now* won widespread acclaim upon its release in May 2019. And with a follow-up already in the works, the future looks brighter still for the 29-year-old. But wherever it may take him, he's determined to do things his own way.

Beardmore's tale as a musician began with learning classical guitar as part of a high school project, leading to him meeting likeminded players, overcoming chronic shyness and forming dub-indie trio The Beaus. He gigged widely in his late teens and early twenties, before branching off as a solo artist with a track on the 2017 *Brownswood Bubblers Twelve Pt. 2* compilation album. He has lived in London for about five years yet hasn't forgotten his roots in Doncaster. "It's a town I always want to have some input into creatively," he says.

'HE'S JUST GOT A GREAT VIBE. VERY INTELLIGENT. VERY ECLECTIC'
— JAMES LAVELLE

Releasing *Dreaming Is Dead Now* on the Brownswood label was a dream come true for a young musician who considers label boss Peterson – also a renowned DJ, broadcaster and tireless champion of new sounds – a constant source of inspiration growing up. "He's a hero of mine," admits Beardmore, who first came to Peterson's attention through his Future Bubblers program to discover, support and mentor new talent.

Were his nocturnal method for writing lyrics not clever enough, Beardmore has another smartly practical system for composing music. It involves starting with a sample, building in beats and layers of instrumentation around it, and then eventually removing the sample from the final mix. "Mostly because I can't afford to pay for it," he admits. But also to leave a little bit of mystery at the heart of his collage-like compositions. "When you hear the song, it might not be obvious how it ended up sounding the way it does," Beardmore elucidates. "But if you knew what the sample was, the missing piece, then it'd be obvious."

PAGE 29



He's planning to take a back-to-basics approach to his next album, which is set to be recorded up in Doncaster soon. "I want to do a really simple lo-fi thing," he reveals. "With all the little tricks that you hear in like Thom Yorke's stuff. All of these intricacies, but without compromising just the raw, straight-to-the-feel."

When he's not dreaming of lyrics for a new song, what kind of musical future does Beardmore dream of? He reaches into the bag of records at his feet for a modest answer.

"When I'm Soho Radio," Beardmore explains, referring to his unshackled DJing remit at the station, "for some strange reason they have absolutely no problem at all with me going from some kind of folksy country tune into 15 minutes of 'The Lark Ascending,' then on to Mos Def. I'd like to be able to do sort of the same thing with my music."

"I want to be able to throw anything I want into the mix – country, some classical, some hip-hop. Do all of those things at once," he says smiling. "But still have a career."



skinnypelembe.com



skinnypelembe.bandcamp.com



[@skinnypelembe](https://twitter.com/skinnypelembe)