

'Fist in the air'

Katy Perry's brash pop-rock attitude will heat up Sunday's Warped Tour

By Karen Lindell

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Sweaty boys, meet sparkling girl.

Yes, all you punk-rock band dudes on the Warped Tour, meet the pop songstress joining your testosterone-laden lineup this summer: Santa Barbara native Katy Perry, whose album "One of the Boys," which includes her hit singles "I Kissed a Girl" and "UR So Gay," was released Tuesday on Capitol Records.

The 2008 Warped Tour, more than 50 bands strong, will infiltrate Ventura's Seaside Park on Sunday with its dream lineup of decibels and mass rock camaraderie.

"It's a lot of boys," Perry said in a phone interview from Long Island, N.Y., where she was promoting the Warped Tour, which begins Friday in Pomona. Perry is one of "very few" female acts on the tour, according to a Warped Tour publicist, who didn't have an exact number because the lineup varies from city to city.

Perry, 23, is both excited and "deathly scared" about the male-dominated tour.

"It's going to be like I'm on a jungle gym," she said.

But even though she's worried about whether she'll be able to take a daily shower on the Warped Tour, or that her traveling cohorts won't want to, Perry, with her quirky feminine charm, sophisticated songwriting skills and playfully chic wardrobe, can more than stand up for herself in a room full of boys, girls, fashion critics and even snarky celebrity bloggers.

"I really want to hold my own, and not just be one of those people" who get comments like, "Oh, yeah, she's good — for a girl," Perry said in an NBC interview.

She's off to a better than good start.

"UR So Gay," Perry's song that pokes fun at metrosexual men and an ex-boyfriend ("You don't eat meat/And drive electrical cars/You're so indie rock it's almost an art"), was released in November

and got an unsolicited critical boost from Madonna, who recently called the tune her favorite song. The video for "UR So Gay," starring a crew of plastic Barbie and Ken knockoffs and clever, low-budget miniature props, has been a viral hit on the Internet.

"I Kissed a Girl," released in April, has been raising eyebrows in conservative circles with innocently risqué lyrics like "I kissed a girl and I liked it/The taste of her cherry ChapStick/I kissed a girl just to try it." This week, it's No. 1 on the iTunes pop chart and No. 4 on the Billboard Hot 100.

Perry has been a media and fashion-industry darling over the past few months, with her face, voice and wardrobe all over the place, including Women's Wear Daily and Blender magazines (the latter calling her "the next big thing"), a (clothed) spread in Penthouse, Perez Hilton's blog ("If Avril Lavigne were actually talented, pretty and had an appealing personality, she'd be Katy Perry," Hilton wrote) and ads for trendy Too Faced Cosmetics.

Her songs have been used on TV and cable shows, including MTV's "The Hills," ABC Family's "Wildfire" and Oxygen's "Fight Girls," and on the soundtrack (album only) for "Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants." She's performed on Carson Daly's show, and last week had a guest role playing herself on the CBS soap opera "The Young and the Restless" (she was the subject of a controversial photo shoot for the fictional Restless Style; the show's characters debated whether she was too "edgy" for the periodical's cover). Her Internet appearances are too numerous to mention.

For "One of the Boys," her debut full-length album on Capitol, Perry worked with Grammy-winning producer Glen Ballard, whose multiplatinum CD credits include Alanis Morissette's "Jagged Little Pill," No Doubt's "Return of Saturn" and the Dave Matthews Band's "Everyday."

She played the South by Southwest Music Festival in March, and was one of five Warped Tour acts invited to perform at the concert tour's promotional kick-off party in April in Hollywood.

FUNNY GIRL

Perry draws kudos for her cheeky songs and personality — but underneath it all is an appealing vulnerability.

The link is her sense of humor.

"I think people can appreciate a songwriter who shows different sides," she said. "The whole angst thing is cool, but if that's all you've got, it's just boring. Everything I write, whether it's happy or sad, has a sense of humor to it."

Perry comes from a "most unlikely to succeed as a pop star" background. Perry's parents are both ministers, and she was raised with a strict Christian upbringing.

MTV? It was forbidden, then and now. Perry said she loves telling her mother, "Mom, I'm going to be on MTV on Monday and you still have it blocked." Music videos? Well, unless you count a DVD of "Sister Act".

Christian songs were gospel. "I knew 'O Happy Day' and other church songs backwards and forwards," she said.

Perry escaped from this Christian music cocoon, however, after a slumber party where she heard "Killer Queen" by Queen and fell in love with Freddie Mercury.

"The lyrics are so theatrical and colorful; I'd never heard anything like it. From then on, they have been my biggest influence," Perry said of Queen.

Perry isn't a runaway prodigal daughter, however. She said her parents, although still strictly Christian, are supportive of her career. She still heads home to Santa Barbara for more than the obligatory Thanksgiving meal and hasn't become an atheist, calling her singing talent "a God-given gift."

Of her parents, she said, "Maybe I'm not exactly the picture-perfect child they would have painted when having me, but I'm not strung out or posing naked. I'm trying to be a classy lady, and also trying to bring rock music back into pop."

Her first album, however, released in 2001 when she was 16, was on a Christian label, Red Hill Records. Titled "Katy Hudson" (Perry has since changed her name, possibly to avoid being mistaken for actress Kate Hudson), the album merited a positive review in Christianity Today for its searching lyrics.

'GOD' AS PRODUCER

Perry, who moved to L.A. when she was 17, said she spent some time in Nashville (accompanied by her mom) working with professional country songwriters to hone her skills.

Learning the lyric ropes from 40- and 50-year-old country music veterans wasn't a stretch for a 15-year-old interested in power-pop rock.

"I learned how to craft a song," she said. "There's not really a formula, but there's a bone structure, especially with pop songs."

Perry's mentors also introduced her to influential people in the music industry, namely Ballard.

"People said, 'Who would be your dream producer?'" Perry recalled. After she saw Ballard on VH1's "Behind the Music" talking about Morissette, Perry knew that she wanted to make a record like "Jagged Little Pill." She returned to her industry insiders with the following request: "Glen Ballard, please. Yes, I'd like to work with God."

Perry met Ballard in L.A. after returning to Santa Barbara, and "he developed me for many years. He really started out what I'm doing," she said. Since then, "I've tried other producers to see how I could grow."

The eclectic "One of the Boys," a collection of ballads along with spunky pop tunes that took Perry five years to make, also features collaborations with producers Dave Stewart (Eurythmics), Greg Wells (Mika, Rufus Wainwright) and Butch Walker (Lavigne, the Donnas).

Hype picked up considerably for Perry's impending album after Madonna, in two separate radio interviews, said "UR So Gay" was her current iPod favorite.

"You only think Madonna has time to do Madonna," said Perry, who learned about the singer's on-air praise when a blogger friend called to wake her up with the news.

"It did change things," Perry said. "It's cool to see that from an artist who's around and still relevant, still looking smoking hot, still has her finger on the pulse of what's going on. I'm like — nobody. Does she really cruise the Internet looking for new music? It must have been through Lourdes (Madonna's daughter). She's awesome."

The song, Perry said in a MediaTV interview (in which she goes miniature golfing wearing pink high heels, white-rimmed sunglasses and a bright-yellow one-piece shorts outfit with a red belt), "is really about a few things. It's about the guys who wear the guyliner, use the (hair) flatirons, steal your jeans that whole almost hipster emo scene. It's so funny to see the guys go through the meticulous beautification in the morning."

The title song from the new album, "One of the Boys," is "a coming-of-age type song," she said in an Internet interview with New York radio's Z100. "Something happens from junior high to high school: We girls start blooming; guys start developing crushes. No longer are we playing dodge ball; we want to sit and paint our fingernails instead."

Still, she considers herself a "tomboyish girl" who happens to love "pastels and hearts."

She dismisses any homophobic concerns about "I Kissed a Girl," saying it's all about exploration and female bonding.

"There's just a magical beauty that women hold that can definitely slay men of all kinds," she said. "If Angelina Jolie, Natalie Portman or Gisele Bündchen walked into the room, everybody would watch."

Perry, who says her songs are "100 percent directly from my life," might be better known for brash songs like "UR So Gay" and "Kissed," but "Fingerprints," a track on the new album, might be her most fitting personal anthem:

I wanna break the mold

Wanna break the stereotype

Fist in the air

I'm not going down without a fight

It's my life

Boys will be boys. Girls will be girls.

And no one will be quite like Katy Perry.



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