

Black-and-white organza gown with satin belt, **Tony Ward Couture** (\$18,000). *Neiman Marcus, Fashion Show, 702-731-3636; neimanmarcus.com.* Heels, **Burak Uyan** (\$875). *Net-a-porter.com.* London blue topaz cable wrap ring, **David Yurman** (\$2,450). *The Forum Shops at Caesars, 702-794-4545; davidyurman.com*



# *She has it*

PUSSYCAT VET AND TRIPLE THREAT NICOLE SCHERZINGER DANCES HER WAY INTO AMERICA'S HEARTS ON THE X FACTOR.

BY LISA ARCELLA / PHOTOGRAPHY BY WARWICK SAINT

# it's

been a long, busy day for Nicole Scherzinger. She's been in the studio putting the final touches on her debut solo CD, *Killer Love*, and she's just finished taping an episode of Fox's *The X Factor*, where she has quickly emerged as the breakout star—even managing to steal much of the spotlight away from the likes of her boss, Simon Cowell.

Returning to the quiet sanctuary of her LA home, the singer/actress/dancer sits outside in her garden to reflect on the whirlwind that will surround her when she leaves these gates and heads back into the world tomorrow. Her life is nonstop, but the 33-year-old clearly knows that this is her moment, and she is savoring every second.

"I feel like I have put a lot of hard work into my career over the years, and now some of that hard work is paying off and the stars are aligning," she says. "You never know where the path is going to lead, but I'm along for the ride and trying to stay ahead of the game. I am grateful that I have this show that I love being a part of. If my music connects through this, then that would be my ultimate dream."

Scherzinger rose to fame in 2003 after being handpicked by Las Vegas entertainment powerhouse Robin Antin to be the lead in The Pussycat Dolls girl band, which went on to

Billboard chart success thanks to singles like "Don't Cha" and its own reality TV show.

"I love that we had the Pussycat Lounge in Las Vegas, and Robin is holding down the fort," she says. "Robin and I are still very close, although we're both so busy I don't remember the last time we talked on the phone. The Pussycat girls will always be like sisters, because we went through so much together."

The singer and dancer is clearly passionate about her career. From the age of six, the tiny beauty with Hawaiian and Russian roots wanted to be the next Whitney Houston. "I always knew I would be a singer and a performer no matter what," she says. "It's in my veins, and I have always seen that vision in front of me. How I would get there I didn't know, but I just knew I had to move forward and take every opportunity. And I have a strong faith that has guided me along the way."

So she followed that dream, despite its implausibility: Born in Honolulu to humble roots, the closest show business connection that introverted Nicole had was that her mother was a hula dancer and her grandmother a local singer. Then the family relocated to Louisville, Kentucky, when her mother remarried, to her German-born stepfather. "I didn't look like anyone else there," she says. "My dad had

adopted me, and I didn't look like his family either. My nickname in school was 'crybaby.' It must have been in the stars that I would be an artist because I was very sensitive and obviously wore my heart on my sleeve."

After majoring in theater in college, Scherzinger joined a band called Days of New, which eventually led to the all-girl group Eden's Crush and a top-10 single. But her big break came in 2003 when Pussycat Dolls choreographer Robin Antin decided she was the perfect addition—and frontwoman—to the phenomenon. It was Scherzinger's first real taste of fame, although she admits her tunnel vision towards success sometimes clouded the view.

"It was international and global," she says. "But when you are inside the bubble and trying to make it to the top and then when you get there and you are trying to stay at the top, you don't see what the rest of the world sees. It kind of passed me by, and that's a little bit of the regret that I have."

Anyone who watched her take home the mirror ball trophy with partner Derek Hough on the 10th season of *Dancing with the Stars* understands that this girl always has her eye on the prize. She was hailed by judge Carrie Ann Inaba as the best dancer the show had ever seen.

"It was so crazy that I didn't let Derek have a break for three months," Scherzinger says. "I worked him seven days a week. I'm known for being kind of neurotic when it comes to work. I am competitive by nature and wanted to make sure that we gave some real performances."

For Hough, it was the perfect partnership and also created an enduring friendship. "I realized that we share a bond in that our families mean everything to us," he says. "We're both incredibly close to them and make them a priority."

In fact, one of Scherzinger's first splurges after finding success was to buy her parents a home in Hawaii. "I love and appreciate money," she says frankly. "I saw how much my family stressed and how much I stressed growing up not coming from money. It takes a lot of stress

Dress, **Valentino** (\$5,600). *The Forum Shops at Caesars*, 702-737-7603; [valentino.com](http://valentino.com). Oval black onyx ring, **David Yurman** (\$4,900). *The Forum Shops*, 702-794-4545; [davidyurman.com](http://davidyurman.com)



off of you knowing that if you get into an accident, you won't have to wonder how you are going to take care of this. I don't take anything for granted."

Audiences clearly connect to the stunning beauty, who has that "X factor" charisma herself, and that's partly because she is still wearing her heart on her sleeve. While not afraid to stand up to Simon ("Someone has to," she says), the camera often catches her with tears streaming down her face during many of the better performances. "When I am touched by a song, you've got me," she says. "That's what

I look for and why we have shows like this. People connect to music—it's universal. I told Simon that I hate that I cry so much. I'm not a pretty crier. But I am like an open heart to music, and when someone moves me and touches me, I can't help it."

Her own music is all about love in all its forms. Her debut album, out next month, is titled after a track she wrote called "Killer Love." "It's a love that I think many

people have gone through. It's a crazy psycho kind of love," she says. "You can't get enough of it, but it's not good for you. The album is fun and empowering and it makes you feel good, but it comes from heartbreak. I feel like a lot of people can relate to that."

Scherzinger's own personal life is a bit less complicated. She has been dating race car driver Lewis Hamilton for the last three years, but says reports that they are engaged are just rumors. And although she is certain that she will one day have a family of her own, there is still too much ahead of her on the career front, including expanding a burgeoning acting career and taking her triple-threat talents to the Broadway stage.

"This is a new chapter of my life," she says, "and I am just at the beginning of the mountain that I see myself climbing." **V**

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Black blazer and sequin shorts, **Tony Ward Couture** (\$12,000). *Neiman Marcus, Fashion Show, 702-731-3636; neimanmarcus.com.* Jenny pumps, **Christian Louboutin** (\$865). *The Shoppes at The Palazzo, 702-818-1650; christianlouboutin.com.* Starburst button earrings, **David Yurman** (\$4,400). *The Forum Shops at Caesars, 702-794-4545; davidyurman.com.* Platinum rubellite tourmaline ring, **Tiffany & Co.** (\$35,500). *The Forum Shops at Caesars, 702-644-3065; tiffany.com*

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Makeup by Kathy Jeung using Dior at themagnetagency.com  
Hair by John D. for Tresemmé at starworksartists.com  
Manicure by Barbra Warner for Zoya/celestineagency.com