# Queer "Midwest Princess" Chappell Roan's rise to the top



Chappell Roan's debut album, "The Rise and Fall of a Midwest Princess," clinched the No. 1 spot on the UK charts on Friday. The Missouri-born pop star, whose real name is Kayleigh Amstutz, is famous for headlining shows often feature drag artists as supporting acts which raise funds for various LGBTQ+ charities, including For the Gworls in New York City, Kaleidoscope Trust in the UK and GLO Center in her home state of Missouri. During her December performance at London's Heaven nightclub, she selected drag queen Bones to be one of the night's performers. "It was one of the best crowds I’ve ever had," Bones remarked, highlighting the authenticity Roan brings to her connections and collaborations within the drag community.

Roan, whose upward trajectory since the album's release last September has been unstoppable, was initially signed to Atlantic Records in her late teens as a downbeat songwriter but was subsequently dropped, an experience that significantly shaped her career.

After returning to her hometown and working in a drive-thru doughnut shop, Roan cultivated a larger-than-life persona, allowing her to fully embrace and express her queer identity—an aspect stifled during her upbringing in a Christian community. "I grew up thinking being gay was bad and a sin," she shared with The Guardian last year. It was a visit to a gay club that she described as "magical," and ultimately transformative. The artist then secured a new deal with Island Records and began to make significant waves in the music industry.

Roan's music draws heavily from the mega-pop sounds of the 2010s, influenced by icons such as Lady Gaga and Taylor Swift. Her work is infused with sexually frank lyrics, doses of camp, and a maximalist aesthetic that pays tribute to drag culture, John Waters, and Freddie Mercury, a unique blend that quickly resonated with younger audiences, particularly queer Gen Z fans on TikTok, and has since grown into a broader phenomenon.

Her rise gained further momentum at the recent Lollapalooza festival in Chicago, where she performed in a lucha libre outfit surrounded by female bodybuilders. Upgraded to a prime slot, she attracted what organizers reported to be the event's largest crowd ever. Her ability to captivate audiences with her theatrical performances has set her apart from many of her peers who also gained fame on social media but struggled to make the same impact on live stages.

Chappell Roan has seamlessly blended the intimacy of social media engagement with traditional performance platforms, effectively broadening her fanbase. In addition to her viral success, Roan has supported artists like Olivia Rodrigo on tour—they share producer Daniel Nigro—and made appearances on shows such as NPR's Tiny Desk concert series and The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon.

Roan's persona and performances are often inspired by drag, with her extravagant costumes and themes encouraging fans to attend in their own creative outfits. Her hit song "Pink Pony Club," derived from an impactful night at a West Hollywood club, has resonated so deeply with fans that they visit the venue just to experience the place that influenced the track. Meanwhile, the club has debuted a "Pink Pony" cocktail in her honor.

The past year has also shown Roan's ability to avoid the common pitfalls of viral fame. Unlike other pop stars who suddenly rise to prominence and then struggle with sustainability or burnout, Roan's multifaceted approach suggests lasting power. With six songs currently on the US Hot 100 and an impending UK No. 1 album, her climb appears to be relentless and indicative of a long-term presence in the music industry.

Chappell Roan's story emphasizes a blend of innovation, resilience, and authenticity, crafting a new path for pop stars in the modern era. Her journey from a small-town upbringing to international acclaim exemplifies her unique ability to bridge diverse fan bases through her groundbreaking performances and dedicated community support.