

CALIFORNIA
STYLE &
CULTURE

Fall/Winter 2019

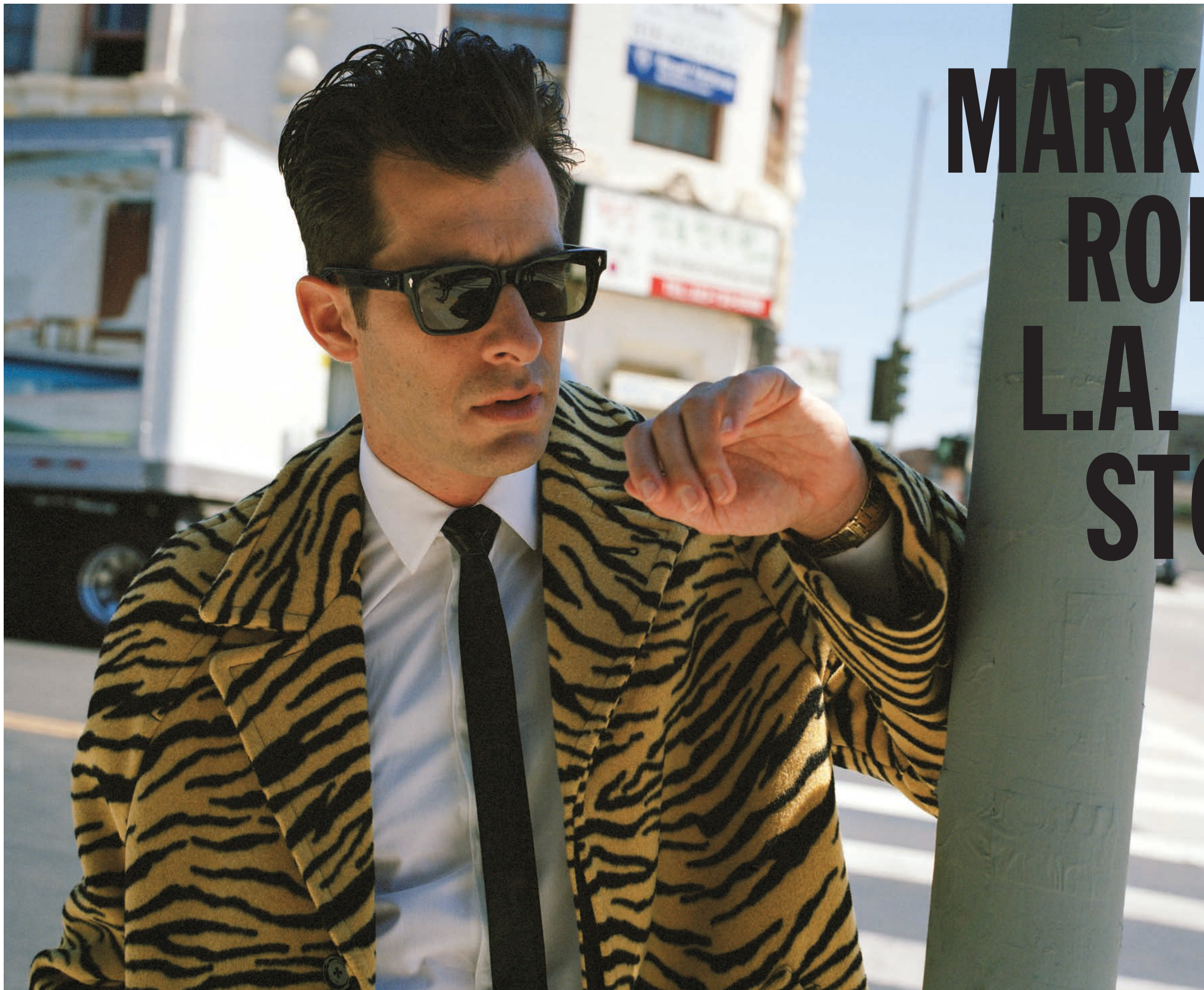
DOWNTOWN FUNK

MARK RONSON

MEN'S EDITION

PLUS RANDE GERBER / ROCKY MOUNTAIN HIGHS / THE MONDAVIS / A VERY MODERN MEMBERS CLUB





MARK RONSON'S L.A. STORY

Having moved to the *West Coast* three years ago, the musician has rebooted his lifestyle and reached peak productivity — making hits with Lady Gaga and Miley Cyrus, and writing his most personal album to date



Mark Ronson lifts his right arm above his head and points to a large black broken heart tattooed on his inner bicep. “I’m the heartbreak kid,” he says, tracing the heart’s outline: “It’s my sad bangers tattoo.”

We are in the control room of his Hollywood recording studio, a dimly lit carpeted cell full of switches and meters where Ronson spent the last year conceptualizing his new album, *Late Night Feelings* — a powerful mix of songs about love and loss, featuring powerhouse artists such as Miley Cyrus and King Princess — which came out this past summer. “I feel this is my safe zone,” jokes Ronson of the studio. “If you’re a kid and made a fort with pillows and sheets, this is pretty much a professional version of that.”

Late Night Feelings, Ronson’s fifth studio album to date, is a dramatic change of direction for the British-born DJ-turned-super producer, who is perhaps most famous for the era-defining bounce of “Uptown Funk” with Bruno Mars. Their 11-times-platinum collaboration spent 14 weeks at No. 1, earned a Grammy for record of the year, has received over 3.6 billion YouTube views, and even

*“I have to
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now, nearly five years later, is still the go-to “wedding f*cking party banger” as Ronson succinctly puts it.

Of the motivation for *Late Night Feelings*, Ronson says in his trademark languid drawl, “I’d rather hit 100,000 people in the gut [emotionally], than have 10 million people smiling with their hands in the air.”

Of course, Ronson (who has seven Grammys to his name) has done emotional before. Case in point: “Shallow,” the Oscar-winning ballad he co-wrote with Lady Gaga, Andrew Wyatt and Anthony Rossomando for the movie *A Star Is Born*. Before that, there was his breakout collaboration with Amy Winehouse: he won the Producer of the Year Grammy for *Back to Black*, her chart-topping 2006 album which explored themes of grief and infidelity.

“I’m a bit of a sponge, I’m empathetic as a producer,” he says. “But I’ve always had this division of labor: they were other people’s albums that I worked on.” Others’ emotions, too. Then he poured his own heart and soul into *Late Night Feelings*. “It came out of the breakup of my marriage,” explains Ronson, who last year





GUCCI jacket, \$2,500, top, \$1,200, and pants, \$780. Opposite: MICHAEL KORS COLLECTION coat, \$3,990. SANDRO T-shirt, \$115. FRAME jeans, \$210.

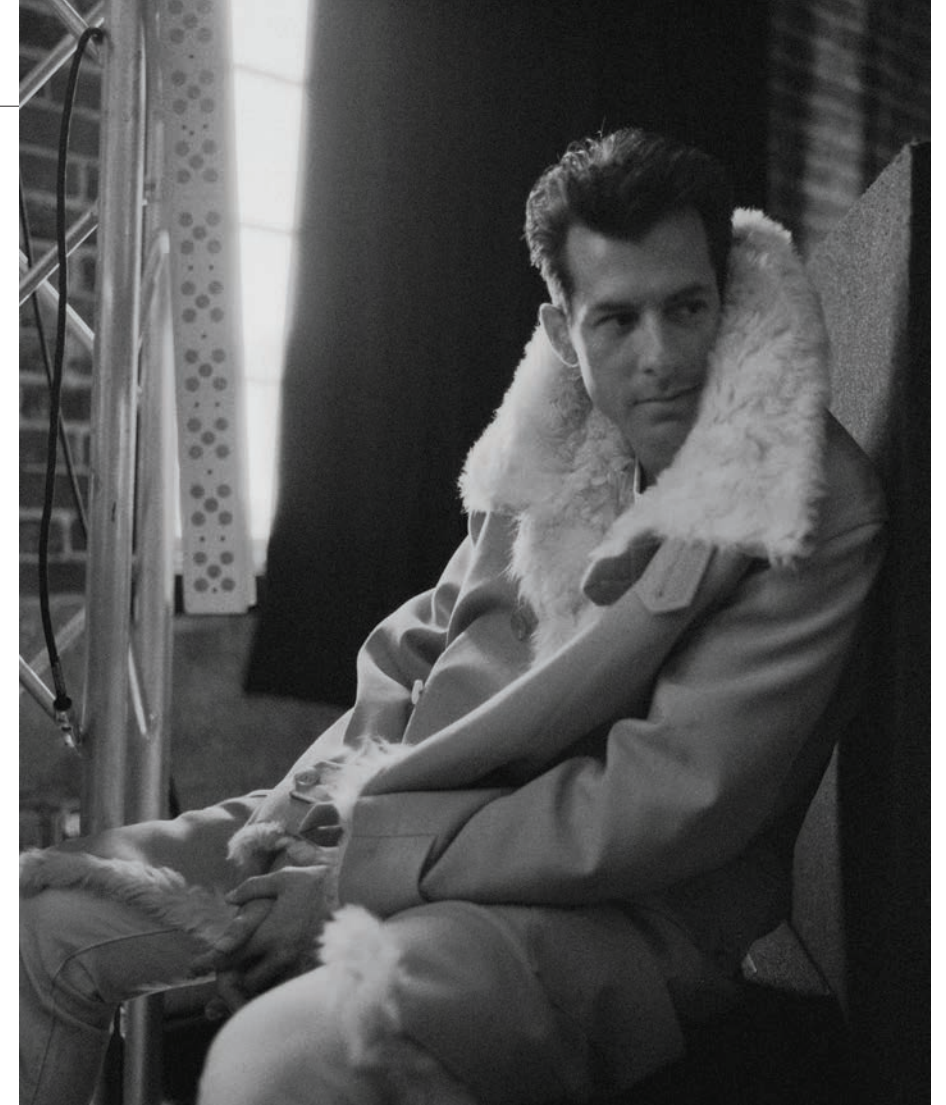
divorced French model and actor Joséphine de La Baume. He says the final track, “Spinning,” sung by Ilsey Juber, is the most personal. “I was reeling,” he says simply. The lyrics, which he co-wrote with the singer, are intense: “I don’t wanna drown, but the waves keep on rolling/ Pour out what’s left in a heart-shaped case/ You can have it all, yeah, it’s yours to break.”

Not that Ronson hasn’t experienced breakups before. “All breakups are cumulative ... but we were together for eight years, so it is by far the most significant relationship of my adult life. ... This was the one that made me go, ‘Let me take a look at my life.’ ... There were two other significant relationships that happened during the making of the record that also contributed to it. The only thing that all my breakups have in common is me. When you have six breakups in a row, [you start to think,] ‘When am I gonna get my shit together?’”

The marriage’s collapse was not unexpected, he says. “But it doesn’t make it any less sad.” Still, he is in no hurry to embark on a new relationship. “I want to date someone for the right reason as opposed to just being with someone for the sake of being with someone. ... It’s five months now, probably the longest I’ve ever been single. I had such a habit of jumping from relationship to relationship before, sometimes it would be a week or two [between girlfriends], once it was only half a day.” However, he is not put off by marriage and wants a family one day. “That’s the main thing I want. Children with a partner, that’s the goal.”

Despite the turbulence of the last couple of years, Ronson says he enjoys life in Los Angeles, where he settled in 2016. He often hikes in Griffith Park, which is near his Los Feliz home, a beautiful four-bedroom Spanish Revival house with an old Hollywood vibe. It took him a while to find his feet in the city: “I was living an isolated existence. L.A. is what you make of it. I do feel it’s the epicenter of music now. There’s no way to live anywhere else if you want to be working on the top-level shit.”

He continues, “The thing about L.A. that is so amazing is, I wake up an hour and a half earlier than I do in any other city I’ve ever lived in. It sounds corny, but you greet the day.” So, he’s up at 7 a.m., which doesn’t sound very rock ‘n’ roll. “I’m 44 now,” Ronson points out. “I have to make some rules now. Bruno’s thing is to work ‘til 5 in the morning. He has so much energy, he’s 10 years younger than me. It’s like, ‘For what?’ I can’t do that shit anymore. ... I want to enjoy life and my house, so I try to cut off at 8 p.m.”



“Being a perfectionist served me in my career. Not so much in my personal life”

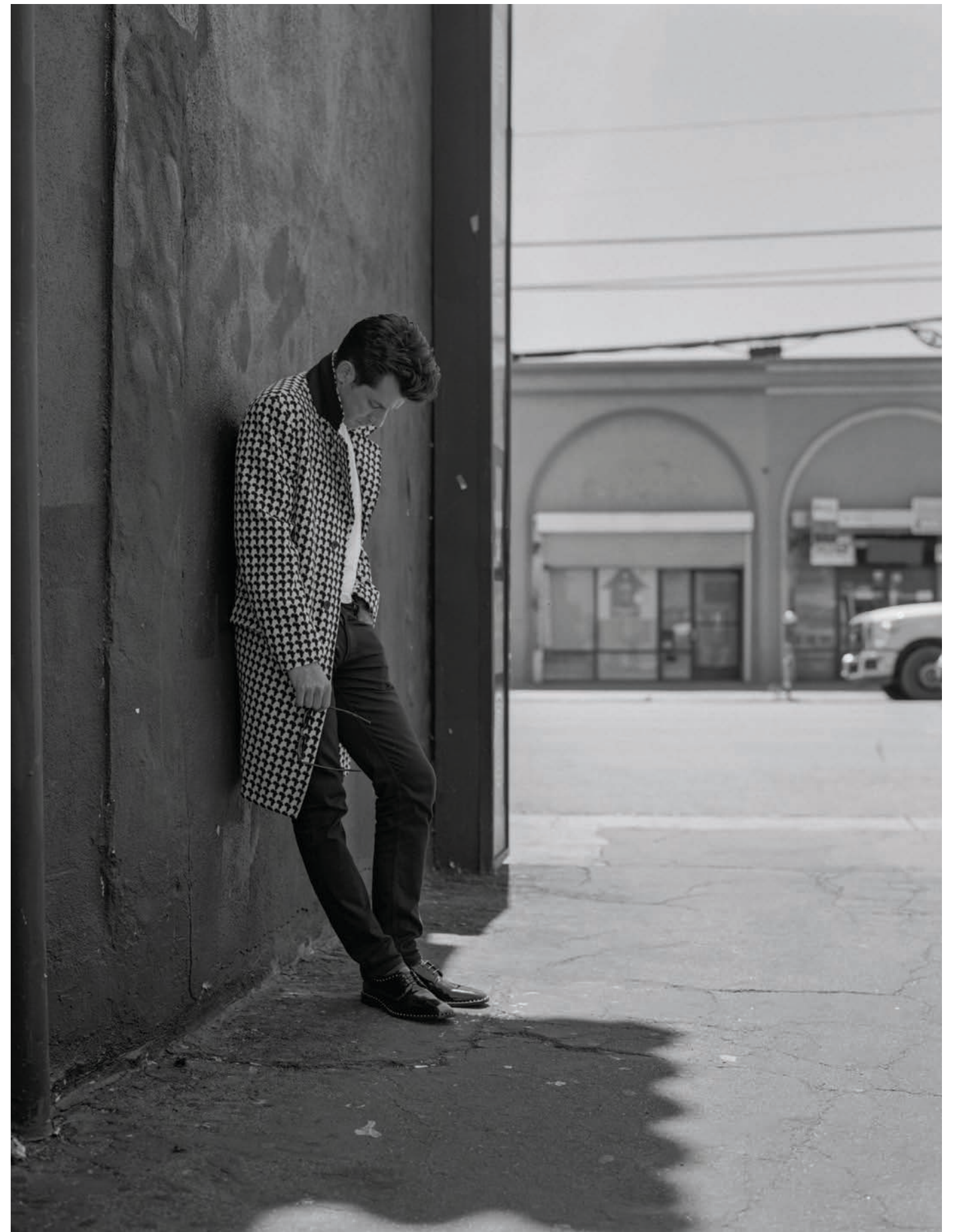
Most days, he spends the mornings at home, walking his two rescue dogs, Pablo and Maisie, meditating, drinking coffee, then going to a local boxing gym to work out before arriving at his studio around midday. Artists come in throughout the afternoon to record with him, or he works alone on material, then he goes out for dinner, maybe to All Time on Hillhurst or Speranza in Silver Lake, with a friend or his younger twin sisters, fashion designer Charlotte and fellow DJ Samantha.

On the weekends, he sometimes goes to Prime Time, a karaoke dive bar in Hollywood. “It’s next to a Mexican cowboy gay bar called Club Tempo, which is incredible.” Still, his life here is much more tempered than in New York, where he has spent much of his life. “In New York the energy is so voracious and frantic [that] I’m in the bar ‘til 3 in the morning. ... [But] now I need sleep if I want to feel good the next day.”

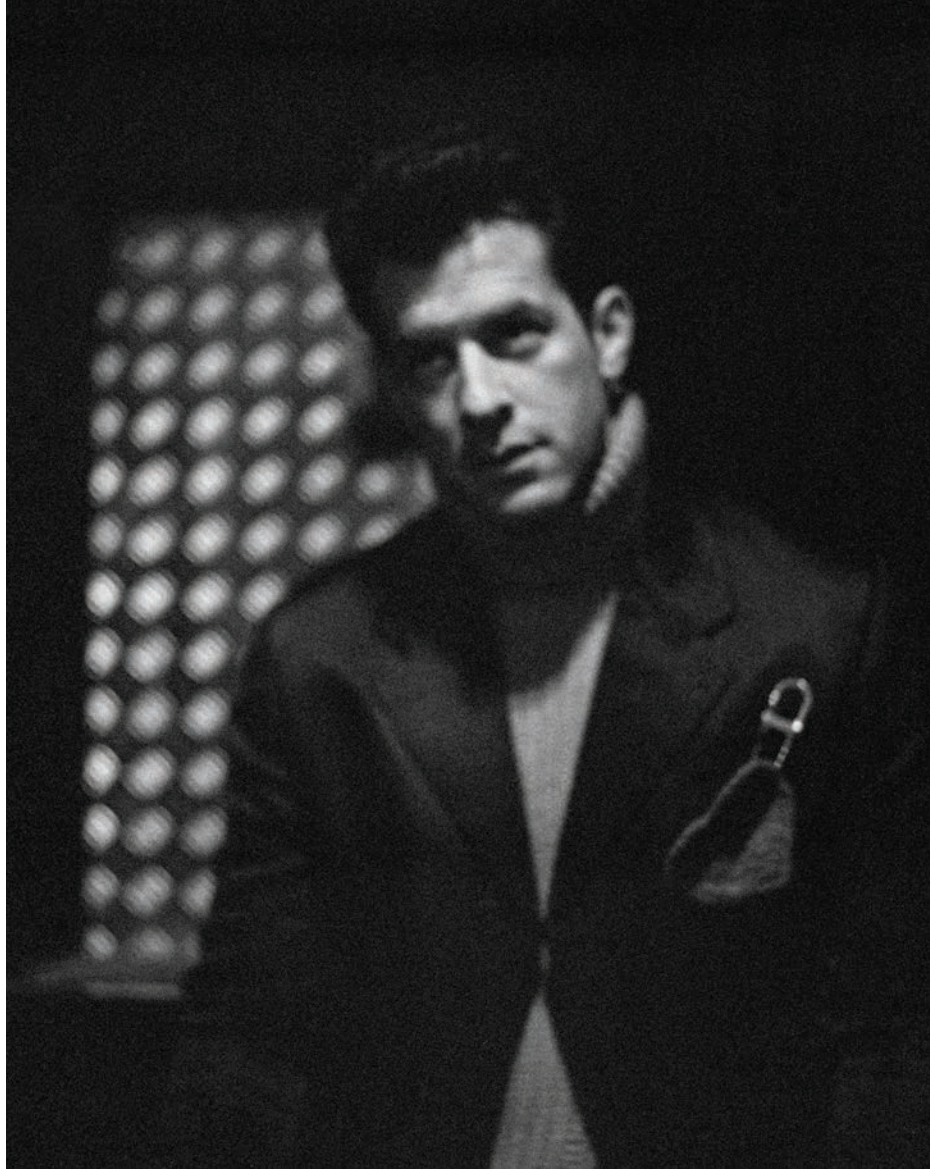
Born in London in 1975, Ronson’s childhood was infused with music. His father, Laurence, a real estate developer and music promoter, managed pop acts like Bucks Fizz, and his mother, Ann Dexter, later remarried Mick Jones,



VERSACE blazer, \$3,725, and pants, \$1,595. SANDRO top, \$245.



LOUIS VUITTON coat, \$1,480, and T-shirt, \$600. JACQUES MARIE MAGE sunglasses, \$525. JIMMY CHOO shoes, similar styles available from \$950. His own jeans.



lead guitarist of the '70s band Foreigner (with whom she had two more children, Alexander and Annabel). When Ronson was 8 years old, the family moved to New York, where celebrity house guests were the norm. Al Pacino and Michael Caine dropped by for lunch, Robin Williams once read Ronson a bedtime story, and Ronson's best friend was Sean Lennon. Paul McCartney even once rescued a young Ronson from drowning. "We were in Long Island, swimming in the ocean," Ronson says. "I was about 7 and ... I got caught in a tide. Paul McCartney was walking down the beach and saw my mom in a panic and went in and grabbed me. When we worked together 30 years later [on McCartney's 2013 album, *New*], he ... was like: "That sounds familiar.""

But Ronson does not romanticize those years. "I had a really f*cking f*cked-up childhood. I love my parents very much, [but] they were not always there, and my dad had his issues. I've blocked out most of [ages] 0 to 5 except for a few traumatic memories. It got a little easier

when my mom married my stepdad. Those are my first pleasant memories of family holidays."

He played guitar in a secondary school band and at age 12 interned at *Rolling Stone* magazine. While at NYU, Ronson made a name for himself as a club DJ, mixing the rock influence of his U.K. roots with New York's hip-hop scene. He attracted the attention of celebrities like Sean P. Diddy Combs, who hired Ronson to DJ his fabled 29th birthday party in 1998.

He used to downplay his background and was mortified when his mother would visit the gritty hip-hop clubs where he was DJing. "My mom would show up and be like [he puts on a posh English voice]: 'I'm Mark's mother, can you show me the DJ booth?' I'd just want to cringe and die. But most people just thought, 'Oh shit, that's Mark's mom, that's crazy.' Nobody held it against me."

But Ronson wanted to be more than just a celebrity DJ, and when Nikka Costa's manager heard one of his sets, he was so impressed he introduced Ronson to Costa, who asked him

to co-produce her album *Everybody Got Their Something*. Soon after, Ronson signed a contract with Elektra Records and released his debut album, *Here Comes the Fuzz*, in 2003.

Despite his success, he has a reputation for being self-deprecating. "It's not a shtick. It's genuinely how I feel — a little English, a little Jewish, neurotic, anxiety-ridden. ... But I just realized it's not helping anyone. ... It feels like old programming that's past its expiry date. ... That doesn't mean I have to [become] some arrogant dickhead, but I would be annoyed if somebody on my level was deflecting praise all the time or not owning some of that shit."

"That shit" includes his work with some of the biggest names in music today: Adele, Lily Allen, Christina Aguilera. Female artists in particular enjoy collaborating with him as he respects their opinions and treats them as equals; Ronson's lack of arrogance makes him an exception among producers. "I grew up around really strong, amazing women. I had a really f*cking strong, dynamic, intelligent, complicated mom. So I don't shy away from [women like] that. Maybe some producers have a hard time falling in line to really powerful women."

In the past he's described himself as a perfectionist ("It served me in my career, not so much in my personal life; I've tried to reframe it as 'striving for excellence'") and once said his goal was to reach the music-making level of Quincy Jones (whose daughter Rashida he dated). "He's my favorite producer of all time. But I don't think anyone will ever be like Quincy; he's a genius. I would like to just continue to make good music that resonates with people."

As for his personal life, he seems to have reached a more philosophical place and is determined to look to the future. "What's that Lily Tomlin quote about the past?" He picks up his iPhone to Google it: "Forgiveness means giving up all hope for a better past." I just love that — we're all hoping for a better past. But we're all where we're supposed to be. There's pain, there's heartache. It's natural to have regrets, but wishing you'd done this or that differently is the biggest waste of time."

Anyway, he says, at least he got a great album out of his misery. "I wouldn't wish [for] the pain it caused me or the pain it caused the other person just for the sake of a record. But if you're going to go through that anyway, then [you might as well get] some good art. It enabled me to make my first emotionally vulnerable record. ... I'm very grateful for that. But I don't want to be the heartbreak kid forever." ●



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BOTTEGA VENETA jacket, \$2,900, and pants, \$1,350. GUCCI top, \$1,100. JACQUES MARIE MAGE sunglasses, \$525. DIOR boots, \$1,200. Grooming by JASON SCHNEIDMAN at Solo Artists using TheMensGroomer. Location CATCH ONE.