

I had originally planned to devote this column to looking back at the most important musical artists of the past decade, as well as speculating about who might be the heaviest of the heavyweights in the coming decade.

In addition, I was going to shine a

particular spotlight on the LGBT artist or act that scored a significant breakthrough in the Naughts and seemed to have the brightest future going into the Teens.

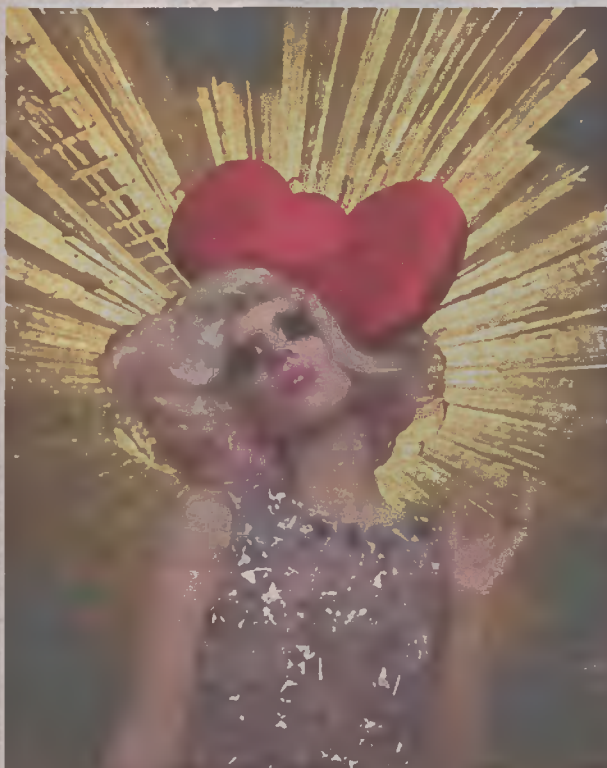
That all changed once I began to compile my shortlist for each topic and realized that

Lady Gaga, who is openly bisexual, was on all three. To be honest, I was a bit taken aback because I hadn't really tried to contextualize Gaga's achievements or prospects before — I just knew I was increasingly becoming a fan.

If we're going for full disclosure here, I have to admit that I never saw Gaga coming in the first place. I was sent a promo copy of her album before it hit the streets and... *nothing*. I left my unopened copy of "The Fame" laying on a pile of CDs on my desk for a few weeks.

You see, I had this one all figured out just by looking at the cover and perusing the song titles. Another pop princess, another throwaway release that would end up being the musical equivalent of Sweet 'N Low, another 45 minutes of my life I'd never get back.

What can I say, sometimes you get it wrong... and



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Going kookoo for Gaga

sometimes you get it *wrong*.

"The Fame" produced four popperfect #1 singles and Gaga backed them up with a string of unforgettable live performances on any show that would have her. Perhaps culminating with a fake-blood-smearing showstopper at the 2009 MTV Video Awards. (The performance would have undoubtedly been the talk of the show had Kanye West not decided to "borrow" Taylor Swift's mic.)

Gaga walked the red carpet all year in one outfit more crazy than the next, but she continually came across as an artist who was destined to be bigger than her shoulder pads and was far deeper than a Kermit the Frog dress.

In interviews, she proved that not only is she no bland pop tart, but she's actually a smart, charismatic, self-deprecating young woman; a hard worker who genuinely appreciates her fans and is in equal parts thrilled and humbled by her meteoric success.

Most importantly, I have recently come to see that behind the fabulously fierce persona of Lady Gaga is Stefani Germanotta, a talented 23-year-old New Yorker who started playing piano by ear at 4 and has been songwriting since she was 13.

Numerous clips of young Stefani paying dues playing and singing her early compositions can be viewed online. Even without the driving electronic dance beats or the spectacle of the back-up dancers, the outfits or even Gaga's trademark platinum hair, the performances are captivating.

Somewhat ironically, it has been discovering these lowkey, purely musical moments that has finally and ultimately convinced me that Lady Gaga possesses the undefinable, elusive *IT* that turns an artist into a global phenomenon. I can't wait to see what the next decade holds for her. ::

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