

On Life and Meaning

MARK PERES

Episode 57 – Lila Allen – Metropolis

A Star is Born

And now a personal word,

Lila Allen and I recorded our conversation in a conference room in the offices of *Metropolis* magazine on the seventeenth floor of 205 Lexington Avenue in Manhattan, across from the New York Design Center and blocks away from the Chrysler Building. I had walked crosstown from my hotel on 10th Avenue and 42nd Street. Along the way I had taken in the city—Broadway between 42nd and 34th Street, Herald Square, the Empire State Building, 5th Avenue, Park Avenue, then Madison Avenue until I arrived at Lexington. Lila greeted me when I arrived in her office. Pages from the next issue of *Metropolis* were pinned on bulletin boards. Writers and editors were huddled around workstations. Covers from past issues of the magazine were neatly framed.

I first met Lila in Charlotte in 2009 a few months after she had graduated from Davidson College. She was twenty-two years old. I was forty-six years old. I was publisher of *Charlotte Viewpoint*, a web-based magazine about metropolitan ideas and art. We published interviews, articles, poems, op-eds, photographs, and reviews about the civic and cultural life of the Charlotte region. Lila submitted a work of first-person fiction called “In the Crosshairs.” The work was smart and literary and compelling to read. And that’s exactly how Lila came across in person: smart, literary, compelling, and far more savvy about art theory and pop culture than I ever could be. Her next piece was one I had requested about Lady Gaga. She entitled it “Fame Monsters: Why We’re Goo-Goo for Gaga Puffs.” That was in February 2010. That month she accepted my request to become editor-in-chief of *Charlotte Viewpoint* magazine.

Charlotte Viewpoint reached its creative peak under her leadership. Lila led a team of talented and dedicated editors, writers, and designers, including Jeff Jackson, Michael Solender, Alex Gregor, Elise Anderson, Casey Brewton, Carolie Bartol, and Chris Cureton. She edited the work of accomplished freelance writers, including Philip Larrimore and Amanda Pagliarini. She wrote her own column every month. She helped produce *type/face*, a live magazine on stage at the Visulite Theatre in collaboration with *Charlotte* magazine, and helped market *Topograph: New Writing from the Carolinas & the Landscape Beyond*, a literary anthology edited by Jeff Jackson and published by Novello Press. Lila also helped lead a complete rebranding of *Charlotte Viewpoint* and the launch of a new website platform. She worked closely with me as publisher and executive director of the underlying nonprofit organization. She got this work done at

night and on weekends while working full-time during the day at the Bechtler Museum of Modern Art.

Our vision at *Charlotte Viewpoint* was to represent the best of what metropolitan ideas and art could be. We wanted to have influence and impact. We wanted to show ambition and meet our promises. Lila embodied our ideals.

In June 2011, after fifteen months of serving as editor-in-chief, Lila asked if we could meet for coffee. She gave notice that she was moving on. Within a year, Lila moved to New York. I remember receiving a call from the Metropolitan Museum of Art asking about Lila. I told them they couldn't hire a better person. The woman on the phone said that Lila had made such a good first impression they had decided to hire Lila on the spot, but they just hadn't told Lila yet. I let Lila know an offer was on its way.

I had all those memories in mind when I met Lila at *Metropolis* magazine. Her work is showcasing design and architecture across the world. Her life and career are a perfect progression of metropolitan ideas and art.

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