

LITTLE BOOTS

FIRST
LADY

This year's electropop sensation Victoria Hesketh, aka Little Boots, tells ANNE GIACOMANTONIO how to survive university. Follow her advice – she got a First...

VICTORIA HESKETH IS EVERYWHERE.

Usually, she's in disguise – hiding behind her pseudonym Little Boots. But you can't escape her unique brand of electronic pop: she's on the radio, she's in the magazines – one of her songs has even made it to a Channel 4 promo. According to the BBC, Little Boots is the sound of 2009, and her debut album, *Hands*, released in June, has become the soundtrack to a disco summer with the likes of La Roux and Lady Gaga.

She's been compared to Madonna (circa *Confessions on a Dance floor*), dubbed a "British Kylie" and even likened to David Bowie. The buzzy single "New in Town" hit the chart at number 13 and comes from an album that debuted at number five.

Various media have her partying with Katy Perry, sharing a smooch with Florence of Florence and the Machine, and accepting compliments on her video from Kanye West. She's been on BBC2's *Later ... with Jools Holland* and Radio 4's *Woman's Hour*, and she has the



LITTLE BOOTS

'I ALWAYS DREAMT OF GOING INTO MUSIC'

coolest electric musical gadget imaginable – a flashing Japanese box called a Tenori-on. There's no doubt that the hype is big and loud – but did you know she grew up in Blackpool? Did you know she got a first-class honours degree from Leeds University, with a dissertation on the concept of originality in the music of Jamie Cullum? Read on.

"Originally I applied for English literature," says Hesketh. When her application was unsuccessful (it happens to the best of us), she had a rethink. "I thought I'd do a course that sounded like I'd enjoy it, even if it didn't sound like exactly what I wanted to do for the rest of my life." Cultural studies it was.

During her time as an undergrad, Hesketh made her way back and forth to her family home in Blackpool as often as she could.

"I guess at the start, I went back more. Then, gradually, not as much. I think it's about balance. You don't want to be legging home every weekend, but my family are very important to me, too."

She matured a great deal during her three years at university. Leeds was "a great place to grow up", she says. "It's big enough for there to be a lot going on, but it still has a sense of community."

Like most students, Hesketh lived in halls for her first year and moved into student digs with a group of mates in her second year. Surprisingly (or perhaps not, taking into account her immense talent), her constant tinkling on synthesizers and pianos didn't bother her flatmates at all. "They all loved it. I had my piano in the kitchen, and we'd have a singalong to the Spice Girls."

The choice of artist is appropriate given her love of all things cheesy. This was by no means Hesketh's first brush with the shiny world of synthetic pop.

Notwithstanding her academic ability, Hesketh had always been destined for the music industry. She's been tinkling on pianos since the age of five. "I suppose I always dreamt of going into music. I was just motivated by wanting to play music all the time," she says.

Those dreams took an early knock when, at the age of 17, she was dropped from ITV's *Pop Idol* in the third round – thankfully for her, before the excruciating televised audition stage. "It wasn't a big deal," she shrugs. "I was very young and it was just something I tried that didn't work out – which I'm pretty relieved about now!"

Instead, her music took a different direction. Hesketh funded her way through university by playing jazzy, easy-listening piano music in hotel bars. This, she says, was good training for her music career, but a completely different style to the beat-infused electro-pop she plays now. She damns it with faint praise: "It wasn't that soulless. I certainly didn't hate it. And I learnt a lot by playing in lots of different situations. For me, it definitely beat working behind the uni bar!"

Then, during her third year at university, Hesketh got her first taste of life as a professional musician. She replied to an ad for a lead singer in a new band, met Yorkshire lasses Lucy and Marie, and the electro rock/emo indie outfit Dead Disco was born. Although they survived only two years, they

had reasonable success in the UK, and even moved to LA to record with the producer Greg Kurstin, who has worked with Lily Allen and Gwen Stefani.

Hesketh says she enjoyed being in the band while studying, even though committing fully to both at the same time was hard work. But the great thing about uni is there is plenty of time for extra-curricular activities, according to Hesketh. Life is very different now, and probably even more hectic.

After playing her set on the John Peel stage at Glastonbury this year, Little Boots rushed off to perform another gig elsewhere, only to be flown back in by helicopter to watch Blur. Tough life, huh?

The best part of university was "the friends I made", recalls Hesketh fondly. "My best friend and I met in halls in the first year, and I still see her all the time. I liked learning too – I'm sure my brain has massively deteriorated since then! – and just the experience of moving to a city for the first time and getting involved with the music scene."

To make the most of your uni experience, though, the super-cool Hesketh warns against being "too cool for school". She remembers "friends in freshers' week who thought all the events were too cheesy, and sat about sulking". Don't do that. Go out and have fun. But, she adds with trepidation, watch what you eat. "Students tend to put on a few pounds in the first year, realising the only thing they can cook is microwave food. Try to eat healthily and avoid too many kebabs."

www.littlebootsmusic.co.uk