



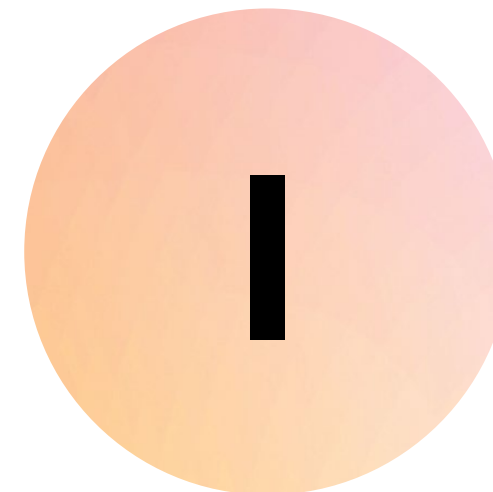
MAKING MTV THE
LAUNCHPAD FOR HER
IMAGE, THE SINGER
BECAME THE ULTIMATE
EARLY-'80S FASHION
INFLUENCER

By Maria Speidel

MATE RIAL GIRL

Madonna appeared in 1985's *Vision Quest* as a bar band singer, performing both "Gambler" and "Crazy for You."

While much of Madonna's personal style became part of her character in 1985's *Desperately Seeking Susan*, the gold jacket she made famous was the creation of the film's costume designer, Santo Loquasto.



Madonna made the cover of *Rolling Stone* for the first time (out of 23) in November 1984 (inset). A year later, on Nov. 9, 1985, she hosted *Saturday Night Live* (above) with Simple Minds as the musical guests.

In the short time between 1983 and 1985, Madonna logged into the pop culture archives a lifetime's worth of headlines and achievements. During these 24 months, the single-named sensation had six hit songs; helped MTV popularize music videos; dropped her second album, *Like a Virgin*; made her major movie acting debut in *Desperately Seeking Susan*; weathered the unauthorized publication of old nudes; launched her first tour; hosted *Saturday Night Live*; appeared on the cover of *Rolling Stone* twice; and on Aug. 16, 1985, married film star Sean Penn on her 27th birthday as photo-thirsty paparazzi in helicopters buzzed above the cliffside Malibu ceremony.

Oh, and along the way, she ignited a fashion revolution that would come to define a decade.

She broke through the pop music scene with the video for "Borderline," the fifth single off her eponymous first album and her first Top 10 hit. Filmed in Los Angeles, "Borderline" told the story of a girl (Madonna) torn between her Latino boyfriend and a WASPy photographer.

(The song was remixed by her then real-life boyfriend, producer Jellybean Benitez.)

MTV put "Borderline" on heavy rotation in late winter 1984 and viewers fell for the fun, flirty, punky girl singing a catchy tune. She was part ratty black swan from dance class in crop tops and mini-skirts layered with sawed-off tights, and part tough chick with heavy makeup, big earrings, loads of

bracelets, and messy, frosted blonde hair scraped back with scarves tied in a bow. She was also wholly original.

"She works with a lot of different stylists and costume designers, but nobody really dresses Madonna except Madonna," director Mary Lambert said in the 2011 book, *I Want My MTV: The Uncensored Story of the Music Video Revolution*, by Craig Marks and Rob Tannenbaum.

Lambert, who directed Madonna's "Borderline," continued, "The whole trashed-out lingerie street-look — where your dark roots and bra strap are always showing, and there's holes in your stockings — that was all her." Lambert would continue her image-defining work with Madonna on 1984's





"I LIKE TO LOOK THE WAY RONNIE SPECTOR SOUNDED: SEXY, HUNGRY, TOTALLY TRASHY."

— Madonna, *Spin*, 1985 —



Artfully toused, Madonna took this quick snap in a Tokyo hotel room in January 1985. She was in the city for the first time to promote her second album, *Like a Virgin*.



Madonna may have sported a streetwise style in the 1984 video for "Borderline" (below, with actor Louie Louie), but her actual street style in August 1986 with husband Sean Penn (above) was decidedly more mature.

"Lucky Star and "Like a Virgin," followed by 1985's "Material Girl," where Madonna traded her street style for a strapless pink gown and Marilyn Monroe glam.

In an age where people twerk at weddings and Cardi B's 2020 No. 1 single, "WAP," explicitly celebrates female sexual pleasure, it can be hard to remember that Madonna's "Lucky Star" video — in which she rolls on the floor in a belly-button baring outfit — was considered shocking. But it was. Exhibit A: *Rolling Stone* writer Christopher Connelly's overt ogling in the magazine's first cover story on Madonna in November 1984: "[The videos] have practically rediscovered what it means to project raw sex appeal... her pouty-lipped antics for "Borderline"; and the upfront eroticism of "Lucky Star," her breasts and bottom thrust at the camera, index finger teasingly tucked into her mouth. Still, her most important bodily part has been her naked tummy, exposed by her two-piece outfits, the curve of it oscillating through male minds everywhere."

While Connelly and other men in journalism and the music industry were breathless and babbling — and offering their expert opinions, including that she would never last as an artist — women said, to paraphrase Nora Ephron, "I'll wear what she's wearing." Teenage fans copied her style — from the fingerless lace gloves and mesh shirts to visible bras — and such was the demand that Macy's opened a Madonna Land boutique selling T-shirts and rubber bracelets.

In April 1985 at the sold-out San Diego stop



● "I like crosses," Madonna (here celebrating the end of her The Virgin Tour at New York's Palladium in 1985) told Brian Hiatt of the *Irish Independent* in March 2015. "I'm sentimental about Jesus on the cross... his message was to love your neighbor as yourself; in other words, no one is better than somebody else."



of The Virgin Tour, a 16-year-old girl told the *Los Angeles Times*, "She's able to be something that our parents would never let us get away with... that whole 'slut' image... It's usually just the guys who get a chance to do that."

Her "bad-girl" image wasn't the only controversy that dogged the singer. In late 1985, both *Penthouse* and *Playboy* published — without her permission — nude photographs taken around 1979 when she was working as an artist's model. Defiant as always, Madonna wouldn't be rattled at Live Aid in July 1985. In the summer heat, she took the stage wearing a blouse, a vest and thigh-length brocade coat over flowered pants. "I ain't taking sh-t off today," she told the crowd. "They might hold it against me 10 years from now."

Thirty-one years later, during her speech as Billboard's Woman of the Year, she dismissed the nude pics, saying she had looked at them and was bored. "They weren't very sexy," she said. "But I was expected to feel ashamed when these photos came out and I was not and this puzzled people."

The photos, her videos and the sexy bridal dress, stockings, garters and Boy Toy belt buckle she wore singing "Like a Virgin" for the MTV Video Music Awards in 1984 created a certain image in people's minds. Madonna just shrugged it off. In March 1985, she told *People* magazine, "I've been called a tramp, a harlot, a slut and the kind of girl that always ends up in the backseat of a car. If people can't get past that superficial level of what I am about, fine." *



● She may have raised eyebrows at the MTV Music Awards on Sept. 14, 1984 (above), but in July 1985, *Penthouse* and *Playboy's* September issues (inset) would dig up early nude photos from her modeling days. As the *New York Post* headline screamed on July 9, 1985, "Madonna: 'I'm Not Ashamed.'"



NEW YORK / June 6, 1985

Madonna flaunted her underwear-as-outerwear chic at New York's Radio City Music Hall. Among the merch for The Virgin Tour were Boy Toy trinkets and crucifix earrings.

PHILADELPHIA / July 13, 1985

Madonna tore through a three-song set at the Live Aid benefit. Despite the 95-degree heat, she stayed fully clothed—a deliberate, defiant move after old nude photographs had been released without her permission just days earlier.



LOS ANGELES / March 29, 1985

Madonna used her lipstick as the exclamation mark on her white statement outfit (including a fur stole) when she arrived at the premiere of *Desperately Seeking Susan*.



Germany / 1984

French artist and jewelry designer Maripol inspired the ensemble Madonna wore in the "Lucky Star" video. "I had already [popularized] the rubber bracelet," Maripol told Yahoo! Entertainment in July 2023, "...and I thought that she was the perfect person to carry around my style. And it was perfect for her as well."

