

GLOBAL CITIZEN

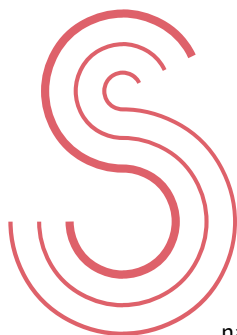
From award-winning A-list actor to breakout singer-songwriter, Indian-born Shruti Haasan is a creative soul with integrity — and an international spirit. She spoke to Editor Emma Winterschladen on the set of our BEAST cover shoot about growing up on a film set, finding her own way and the power of art to unite us all

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Styling **MARIA LOIZOU**

Hair and Makeup **RUUBY.COM**

Location **COURTHOUSE HOTEL SHOREDITCH**



Shruti Haasan arrives to our shoot in Dr. Martens, a skull-embroidered black dress and a hooded denim jacket. She looks every part the cool rock chick, and a world away from the red carpets and lavish award ceremonies of India, where she has long been a household name. But, it turns out, glitz and glamour is just one facet of Shruti's life.

"I grew up with The Beatles, Led Zeppelin and The Who. I was definitely one of the only young girls listening to metal in Chennai. Can you imagine how hard it was for me to get my hands on a copy of NME magazine?"

Shruti also grew up around, as she calls them, "idealistic artistic conversations". Born to the acting dynasty that is the Haasan family, her father Kamal is a multi-award winning actor, director and humanitarian. But did a career in showbiz feel inevitable? "In some ways, it didn't really feel like a choice for me. A lot of my childhood was spent on movie sets and I was always listening to my parents and their friends talk about art and changing the world."

First, though, Shruti wanted to change her own world, and that involved carving out a new path. "When I was younger, I was always trying to find normalcy in other parts of life, so I could eventually come back to art on my own terms versus what was expected of me." And what was expected? "Well in India, there were a lot of ideas of what and how an actor or a singer should be... I felt there were a lot of 'should bes', and I don't want my life to be about the should bes." ■■■▶



Pink jumpsuit,
£89.99, Zara



Opposite page:
Black dress, £699,
ByVarga; shoes,
£119, Kurt Geiger
This page: Blue top,
£469, ByVarga



'YOU DON'T NEED TO BE WEARING A SLOGAN ON YOUR T-SHIRT, YOU JUST NEED THE CONFIDENCE TO BE THE ARTIST YOU INTENDED TO BE AND TO TELL THE STORIES THAT NEED TO BE TOLD – THOSE ABOUT REAL PEOPLE, TODAY'

It's perhaps only now though, a decade into her wildly successful film career, that Shruti is really starting to shed the 'should bes'. "In the past I never used to be that strict about what I took on, and I think most people go through a phase of doing this and that. I don't regret it – I learnt so much from those experiences, but now I'm at a point where I can be pickier, and say 'no' more often." And Shruti can afford to be picky. She's just finished filming her on-screen debut in the US, with her role as assassin Nira Patel in *Treadstone*, based on Matt Damon's Jason Bourne, as well as launching her debut EP in the UK in early 2020.

It's no doubt a move away from her Indian film roots, where she has grown a dedicated and vast fan base (her online following alone currently sits at nearly 20 million followers). How do her long-time fans feel about her venturing into new territory – both physically and professionally? "What's really exciting for me is taking my Indian fan base on another journey from what they may have expected. When I started doing gigs in London last year, it was so wonderful to see my Indian fans there, offering an open ear and heart to my English material. But then there's this new audience, who don't necessarily know me as well but just like the music, and that's really powerful for me as an artist."

As her new, more international audience continues to grow, Shruti is keen as ever to embrace her cross-cultural identity. "People who don't know me can't ever really place me and I love that. And that's what my music is about: a women in her 30s who's from India but lives everywhere, and feels a part of it all. I definitely think of myself as a global citizen."

As for her musical style, Shruti calls it "alternative", with elements that aren't genre specific. "Melodically I still go back to singer-songwriter on my piano. That's how I've always written my music. My language of communication in my songs is English, but I also want to bring in my Indian heritage in a way that's not too obvious or makes a caricature of it. That's my responsibility to my culture."

At the heart of Shruti's music is a sentiment similar to the conversations of her youth: that good art holds the power to change the world. "You don't need to be wearing a slogan on your T-shirt, you just need the confidence to be the artist you intended to be and to tell the stories that need to be told – those about real people, today, and the ways in which we are all united in the human experience. I am a walking example of how cultures can come together." It's an optimism that Shruti feels nowhere more than walking the streets of East London, where she has a flat. "There's a real community spirit and energy of acceptance from people in this city." It's this sense of solidarity that has inspired much of Shruti's music – that, and the weather. "I just love the British weather! The grey and the gloom and the rain for me are a reminder that life is unpredictable, and that we are all at the mercy of Mother Nature anyway. I find it a very creative place to be."

So often we seek out the extraordinary, and Shruti's life in many ways is just that. But she's also a testament to how the ordinary things in life – be it the music, people or places we share – can be the most unifying force for good in this broken, beautiful world. **📍 @shrutzaasan**

Shruti Haasan's EAST LONDON

ACE HOTEL

I used to stay here before I got my flat and I loved how it is right in the heart of everything in Shoreditch. It was always full of musicians too.

**100 Shoreditch High Street,
E1 6JQ**

BOXPARK

The pop-up stops are always great to wander around when I've got some time.

**2-10 Bethnal Green Road,
E1 6GY**

THE GREAT FROG

The best place to buy unique jewellery.

**1-4 Holywell Lane,
EC2A 3ET**

ANDINA

Their ceviche is my favourite.

**1 Redchurch Street,
Shoreditch, E2 7DJ**



Sequined blazer,
£89.99; sequined
trousers, £59.99,
both Zara