

# SERENITY NOW

With her first solo album on the way, Normani is feeling more confident and secure in herself than ever. To thank: a routine of daily affirmations (yes, a little mirror pep talk!), living room dance sessions, and a glowy skin-friendly diet. Settle in and listen as she shares her remixed tune.

PAGE 92

BY  
JESSICA HERNDON

PHOTOGRAPHED BY  
DENNIS LEUPOLD

FASHION EDITOR  
KRISTEN SALADINO

STYLING CONSULTANT  
MIMI CUTRELL



**Normani Hamilton had good DIY intentions in early lockdown. But like so many of us attempting to be all things while in self-isolation, her best-laid plans didn't quite work out the way she'd hoped. "For a long time, I was trying to do my own nails," says the singer-songwriter. "Actually, I'm missing a nail right now," she adds, waving a hand in front of the camera during our Zoom chat to reveal a botched manicure. "There are some things I just can't do."**

She's since remedied the situation with some (safe) professional help for her hands, but the chill reaction to her beauty fail is notable, even if it may seem like no big deal. Instead of her typical pursuit of absolute perfection, Normani is learning, in little ways, how to go with the flow, a new concept for the 24-year-old. "I'm an overachiever," she says. "If I put 99.9 percent into something, then that's me selling myself short. But I think there's levels to that, which I became more aware of last year."

The catalyst for this self-discovery? Technical difficulties while performing her hit "Motivation" at the 2019 MTV VMAs. Though the sound issues were out of her control, Normani says she "ended up dwelling on it days after the performance." But she finally was able to shake the frustration after telling herself, "Let go and keep it pushing," she says. "That one performance doesn't define me."

Since then, she's worked at being easier on herself by embarking on a path to establish a better mind-body bond—and a more fulfilling career. As the performer readies her debut solo album, which she describes as "empowering" genre-bending tunes with a pop sensibility, she's on the verge of creating the record of her dreams. "For a long time, I was stressed out about checking boxes like, 'Is this Black enough? Is this pop enough?' But music started feeling way better when I just went into the studio with the mentality of being Normani." That mindset, she says, is firmly rooted in the idea of connection. "People will always remember how you made them feel and what a record did for them," she says. "My lyrics have more depth, and they're more intentional and come from a more authentic place, because I now feel more connected to myself than before."

Lockdown has only strengthened that inner relationship by allowing Normani to slow down and concentrate on her wellness. "I've been able to meditate more and take a time-out before allowing anybody else to affect my energy," she says of her revamped self-care rituals. "Before I talk to anybody, before I look at a text, before I go on Instagram, I center myself in

my room and pray and do breathing exercises and create my own space so that I have a foundation to walk on throughout the rest of the day."

For Normani, yoga is a form of meditation. "It is spiritual for me," she says of the practice, which she added to her routine about two months before the pandemic. "I'm working out, but I'm also becoming more in tune with my body. Having more awareness about what's going on pushes me to be in the now and to breathe, which is something I desperately needed because I'm always thinking ahead or dwelling on something that could've been better." Being able to focus on this aspect of her routine has been eye-opening. "I did not know I needed this time as much as I did because I was going, going, going," she adds. "But now, I'm able to be more intentional and give things the proper focus they deserve."

Confidence-building was also something that needed more of Normani's attention. Back when she was a member of the girl group

Fifth Harmony, which formed from the second season of *The X Factor* in 2012 and split in 2018, she struggled with self-worth after being overlooked for opportunities as part of the band. "That alters the perception you have of yourself," says the singer, who was the only Black member of the group, originally consisting of Camila Cabello, Ally Brooke, Dinah Jane, and Lauren Jauregui. "Having certain things happen so blatantly while also feeling like the 'other' and being so young and hearing the

**PREVIOUS SPREAD**  
PURSUIT THE LABEL swimsuit, pursuitthelabel.com; MONICA VINADER earrings, monicavinader.com; Normani's own earrings (worn throughout); JENNIFER FISHER bangles, jenniferfisherjewelry.com; KHIRY ring, khiry.com  
**OPPOSITE PAGE**  
CYNTHIA ROWLEY swimsuit, cynthiarowley.com; JENNIFER FISHER earrings and ring, jenniferfisherjewelry.com; ROXANNE ASSOULIN necklace, roxanneassoulin.com; TUSA goggles, leisurepro.com



public compare [us] took a toll on my confidence,” she says. “For a long time, I didn’t believe in myself because I didn’t feel like I was given the opportunity to.”

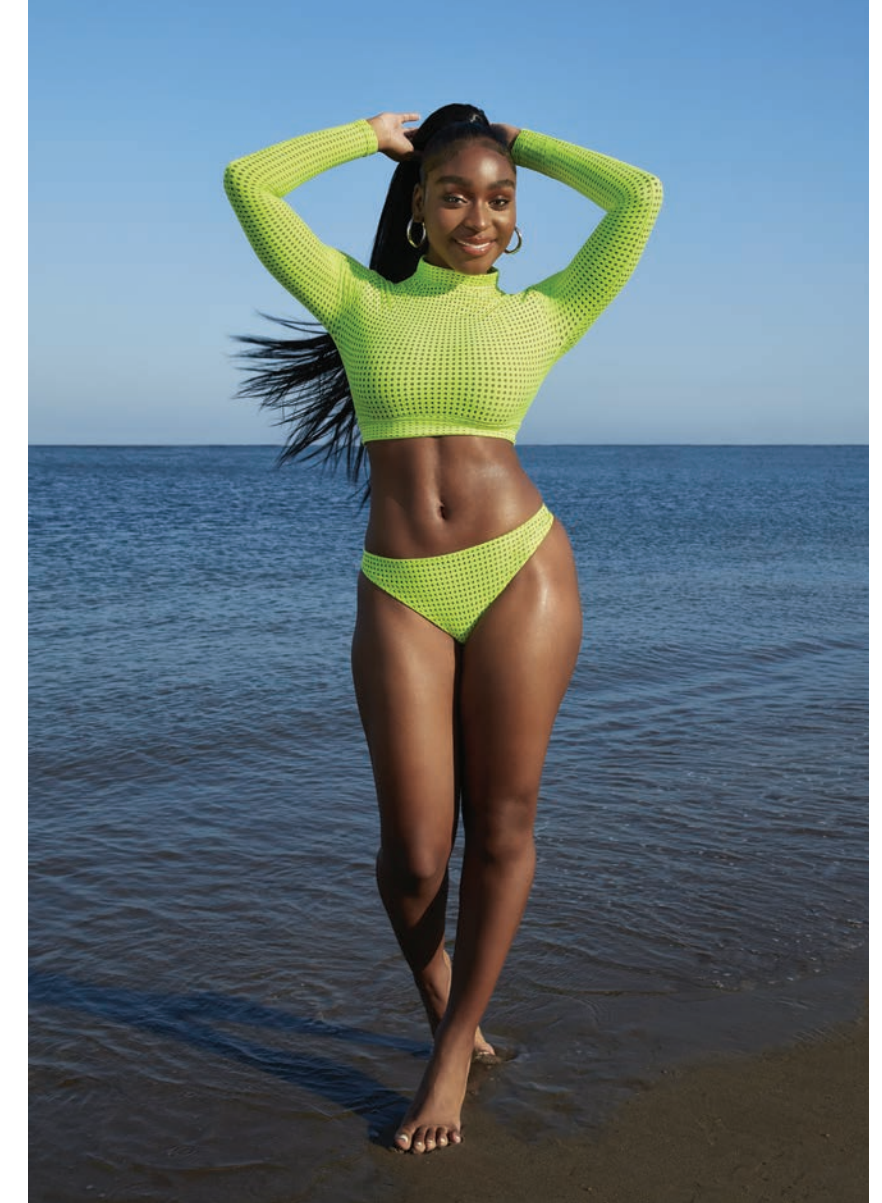
Also a victim of racism after some of the group’s fans thought she insulted Camila in an interview, Normani endured online trolls posting altered images of her being lynched. She’s since become a diversity ambassador of the anti-cyberbullying nonprofit The Cybersmile Foundation. In the role, she advocates for an end to online abuse and provides support to bring awareness to the program. “It’s been meaningful to let people know that despite being in the position I’m in, I’m affected the same way,” she says.

Though she knows she’ll continue to face things that are out of her control, Normani believes there’s plenty she does have power over. “Words of affirmation are new for me,” says Normani of how she pumps herself up. “I look at myself in the mirror and manifest and speak things that I want to happen as

if they already did, as if I’m already that version of myself.” These avowals include phrases like, *You are beautiful. You are a master of your craft. You are one of the greatest entertainers. You are a representation for an entire generation. You are important. You have purpose.*

Normani admits it’s been easy to fall victim to negative thinking, especially during these uncertain times. But by committing to thinking positively, “I’ve tried to flip it and control that narrative for myself,” she says.

Cultivating that rock-solid perspective has required another key tool: dancing. “Dance was my first passion,” she says. “I’ve always felt like performing was my best language.” But adjusting to life without the freedom to hit the stage has been tough for the pop star. “I really miss it,” she says. “It’s crazy.” To help fill the void left by not being able to put on a live show, Normani has been performing “mini concerts” at home in Los Angeles. “It’s typically me in the



shower being overdramatic,” she adds with a laugh. Still, she yearns for the energy of a crowd, which she has been accustomed to since she began taking part in dance competitions at age 9 after relocating to Houston from New Orleans when she and her family lost their home during Hurricane Katrina.

Watch Normani twerk and drop down into a full split in Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion’s “WAP” video; see her execute fluid body rolls, as she did in her performance of the multiplatinum duet “Love Lies” during the 2018 Billboard Music Awards; or marvel as she completes a double pirouette in the video for “Dancing With a Stranger” and bear witness to her raw talent and passion. “I’m at home when I’m onstage,” Normani says. “I don’t feel misunderstood, judged, like I have to fit inside a barrier. I feel like I can be anything.”

In addition to her solo lockdown dance parties, Normani works out three days a week, alternating between Zoom sessions with her trainer, Kevin Mejia of Dogpound gym, and virtual yoga classes. With Mejia, she focuses on cardio and “areas like my abs and butt,” she says, adding that squats, walking lunges with elastic bands around her thighs, planks, and mountain climbers end up giving her a full-body workout. Hiking is another activity she enjoys. “Doing it with a mask is hard,” she says of the treks she’s been on recently. “But [I’m] making it happen. I need to prioritize being more connected to nature. I’m motivated by making sure I’m always working toward something.” (And in this case, it’s fresh air and more vitamin N.)

**OPPOSITE PAGE**  
GIGI C BIKINIS swim-suit, [gigicbikinis.com](http://gigicbikinis.com); MONICA VINADER earrings, [monicavinader.com](http://monicavinader.com); CANVAS bracelets, [canvasstyle.com](http://canvasstyle.com)  
**ABOVE**  
ACACIA bikini, [acacia.co](http://acacia.co); MACHETE earrings, [shopmachete.com](http://shopmachete.com)



Maintaining a healthy diet is also essential for Normani, who calls herself “such a creature of habit” when it comes to the three meals she eats each day. For breakfast, she’ll have an omelet with spinach and turkey bacon or smoked salmon and fruit. And for lunch and dinner, she enjoys a salad with a protein, like fish or chicken, and a side of mashed potatoes or sweet potatoes, often ordered from Tender Greens. Between meals, she snacks on almonds, pistachios, sunflower seeds, and garlic olives or drinks a smoothie packed with kale or spinach, strawberries, bananas, and almond butter. To satisfy her sweet tooth, she goes for vegan ice cream.

Absent from her plate are pork, beef, dairy, and gluten. Normani, who has struggled with acne and eczema, started cutting certain foods from her diet a few years ago. But after sticking to a strict vegan

diet became too difficult, she shifted to mostly pescatarian meals, supplemented by doses of turmeric and probiotics. Through the process of elimination, she determined which foods made her feel good, which made her feel bloated, and which (hello, dairy!) made her break out. “I’m trying different things to be happy and maintain a healthy lifestyle,” she says.

When it comes to her well-being and her career, Normani, who became a face of Urban Decay cosmetics in June, is paving the way for lasting success. She’s loved by other iconic women in the music world, from Janet Jackson to Beyoncé, and also Rihanna, who wrote, “Ugh why can’t I be you?!” on Twitter when Normani performed in her 2019 Savage X Fenty NYFW show. “It’s alarming when people you’ve looked up to, respect, and who kind of define who you are believe in you,” Normani says. “But it definitely gives me confidence. I’m grateful to feel seen and heard and like I can be the voice for so many people. Being a Black woman, I feel we’re so multifaceted and have so much that we’re capable of. It’s really important to show Black girls and Black boys they can be anything they want to be.”

And despite operating under a new set of rules for life in a pandemic, Normani is all about rolling with the punches so she will continue to grow...and she even has a lightbulb moment as we speak. “Hopefully, in the next few years I’ll have life a little bit more figured out,” she says, pausing for a moment before adding, “But if I don’t, I’m okay. I don’t think we ever have it all figured out. But anything that God has placed on my heart, I want to be fearless in.”

So with her mind and body in better sync now than ever before, Normani seems primed to tackle any obstacles that may pop up in her path. But really, for her, it’s all about the journey to a higher place and an elevated understanding of herself. And what’s more harmonious than that?

HAIR: Ashanti Lation of VIP Luxury Hair Care. MAKEUP: Rokaal Lizama. PROP STYLING: Cate Geiger.

**OPPOSITE PAGE**  
GIGI C BIKINIS swim-suit, [gigicbikinis.com](http://gigicbikinis.com); MONICA VINADER X DOINA earrings, [monicavinader.com](http://monicavinader.com); JENNIFER FISHER pinkie ring, [jenniferfisherjewelry.com](http://jenniferfisherjewelry.com); KHIRY middle-finger ring, [khiry.com](http://khiry.com)  
**THIS PAGE**  
DOS GARDENIAS swimsuit top, [dosgardenias.com](http://dosgardenias.com); LILI CLASPE earrings, [liliclaspe.com](http://liliclaspe.com)



**GREEN MACHINE**  
This badass boat is fully electric (no gas needed) and produces zero emissions. Talk about a dream! [zinboats.com](http://zinboats.com)