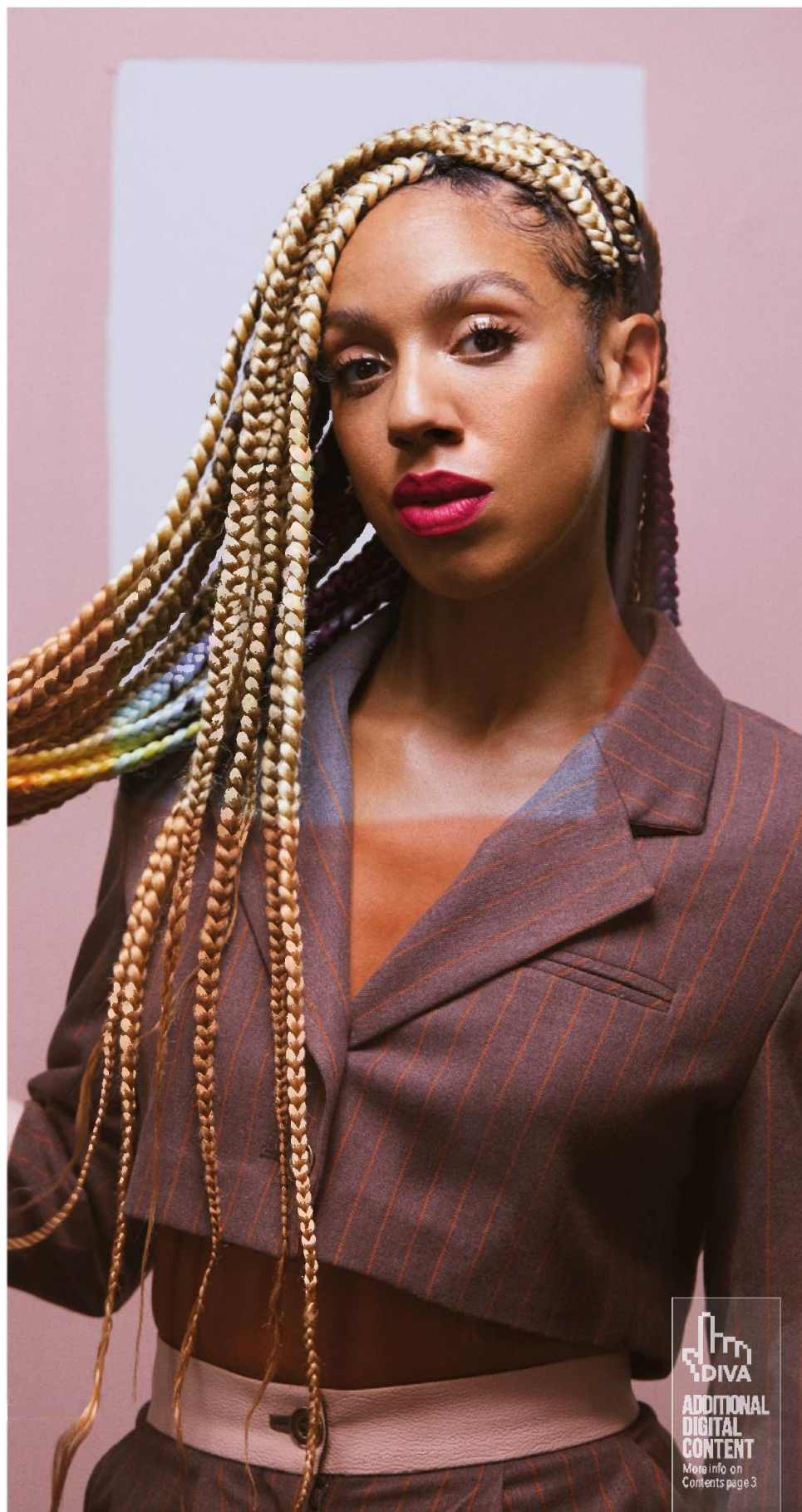


CULTURE



42 **Connectivity**
Grace Petrie talks making music,
being butch and finding love



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More info on
Contents page 3

PHOTOS DAVID REISS

Bi and proud

with Pearl Mackie

Pearl Mackie made our queer hearts swoon when she came out as bisexual last year. This is the first time Pearl has been interviewed by a queer magazine since that awesome day and our conversation falls on the perfect date, Bi Visibility Day. Pearl joins the Zoom call and her smile lights up the screen. She's surrounded by art, my favourite being a portrait of another bicon, Frida Kahlo.

Throughout her career, Pearl has helped many of us see ourselves represented. We bond over the fact that neither of us can recall the first time we saw a bi character on TV. "There's a lot of negativity that surrounds bisexuality. We're seen as overtly sexual, that we'll sleep with anyone. Just because I'm attracted to all genders doesn't mean I'll sleep with anyone... As a whole, we are doing a lot better with queer representation, but things that don't fit into the bracket of gay or lesbian are underrepresented. I think there is room for more. Not just so that people can understand us, but so the stereotypes are shattered, because they're bullshit."

When Pearl was 10, she was excited to be playing Nancy in a school production of *Oliver!* The Musical. Her mum took her to see it in the West End because there was a mixed race woman playing Nancy. "I was blown away and thought, 'Maybe I can actually do this for real!'"

THE STAR OF DOCTOR WHO AND THE LONG CALL OPENS UP ABOUT BI REPRESENTATION, THE POWER OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND HER COMING OUT JOURNEY
WORDS NIC CROSARA

Since then, Pearl has made her way into our lives through both stage and screen. Her latest on-screen role is single mum of two, DS Jen Rafferty in ITV drama *The Long Call*. On TV, Black single mothers are often depicted in ways that can be damaging, but Pearl's portrayal of Jen is refreshingly multidimensional. "I wanted the relationship between Jen and her kids to be realistic and loving, but nuanced. I wanted it to not be stereotyped in any way."

And of course, we all loved Pearl as Bill Potts, Doctor Who's first openly gay companion. I'm curious if the role helped Pearl navigate her own sexuality. "I was more focused on the character and people's reactions to her being out and proud. The reception was overwhelmingly positive. If

character. She tells me about a Comic Con in Berlin. "One young girl came up to me. She was quite emotional. I gave her a hug. She said, 'Without you I wouldn't have been able to come out to my family.'" Pearl becomes tearful. "I was able to represent myself as a queer brown woman without even knowing it. Which is surreal."

When Pearl came out during Pride month, it was inspiring to see her embrace being Black, bi and proud. I ask if she can remember the events leading up to her post. "The Black Lives Matter movement had erupted, and the murder of George Floyd." Pearl describes her experiences of attending the London marches. As well as being her first time in a crowd since lockdown started, it was also "the first time I'd seen a majority Black and ethnically diverse crowd on a march ever, which was really powerful". Like many, the pandemic forced Pearl to reflect. "Social media was our means of communication. That's how the movement spread globally. I felt it was my duty to share as much as possible." Pearl eventually burnt out and took some time away from her phone. We both get choked up as she continues to tell me how this allowed her to process past experiences of racism that had happened in both her professional and personal life. "It was the first time I explored a lot of those and was honest about how they had affected me. It was

"I was able to represent myself as a queer brown woman without even knowing it"

I was going through that and trying to navigate my sexuality, I think that would have been overwhelming." She looks back fondly on how excited young people of colour were about her



“There is so much to fight against, why am I fighting against myself?”

>>> cathartic, but painful. It made me think, ‘I’m being so honest about so many elements of my life, I’m not being honest about my sexuality. There is so much oppression [of] Black people and queer people. There is so much to fight against, why am I fighting against myself?’ I didn’t want to post something for Pride as an ally. I’m a proud member of the LGBTQ+ community and I want everyone to know it.”

Pearl tells me the relief she felt through coming out. “So then I changed my Hinge profile to girls and guys. Big up Hinge for having that, because not many do. A bit later I met my girlfriend, which was great.” Pearl often posts pictures with her girlfriend, being bi and visible. It’s brilliant for LGBTQI people of colour to see public figures who look like us and love like us, but I wonder how Pearl decides how much to share and what to keep private. “I’m happy to post pictures of us. I mean, we look great together. I think it’s important for us to take things slowly, as slowly as you can in a relationship between two women. We are very happy.”

Later on that day after our call, I see Pearl share a Bi Visibility post on Instagram showing her and her girlfriend serving up Black and brown queer joy. As I read the caption, I am reminded of the potency of Pearl’s visibility to our community: “Happy #bivisibilityday from your favourite fine-ass bi queens, to all of our bisexual brothers, sisters and non-binary siblings.” 🏳️‍🌈

The Long Call is available to stream on the ITV Hub and BritBox now