"There was a feeling at one point of “does anyone actually care if I write another song?", says Rose Dougall, sat in the garden of a pub on a cold early autumn evening. She pauses and repeats the question she's asked herself over the past ten years: "and do I?"

The result of her defiant "I do" is Stellular, a shockingly confident album of 11 tracks of classic songwriting and something defiantly modern, glowing with clarity and purpose. It is, Rose says, the sound of her finally embracing the pop sensibilities she reacted against for so long. "I wanted to make something bolder, less apologetic, more decisive," she says. "I wanted to make a sophisticated pop record".

Stellular is the culmination of the strange and hectic decade or so since the 19-year-old Rose jacked in college to go on tour with The Pipettes. Since she made the bold move to quit that band and go it alone, her musical trip has taken her from the introspective sounds of debut solo album Without Why to performing as part of Mark Ronson's touring band on a never-ending world tour.

"It was quite an overwhelming experience," Rose says of the two-and-a-half-year Ronson outing. "It was a total whirlwind, playing to thousands of people and really performing, which was something my solo record did not call for - there was a lot of me hiding behind my fringe and being indie, but then I was forced to the front of the stage. It was a bit of a sink-or-swim scenario."

This experience was what led to Rose deciding that she wanted to embrace the pop world again, albeit on her own terms. "I've had to accept it's what I'm good at," she says, "especially in this country we see that as a bit vulgar, there's that natural sense of being apologetic. I wanted to be a bit more assertive." She laughs - "I've cut my fringe off".

After Rose finished the Ronson jaunt in 2012 she spent time writing with various people in different situations, from studios all over London to a log cabin in Long Island at the depth of winter. Part of this was rejecting pressure to go in directions that might have reflected the opportunity offered by the new audience she found on the road, but would have ended up meaning working with teams of writers "where you lose that singularity of vision - it's by committee". Over the ensuing months Rose wrote and discarded as many as 80 songs, discovering what she didn't want to do as much as she did, "It was daunting and stressful," she says. "I think I lost my way for a time." There were periods of extreme writers block, where she says "I wasn't in charge of my faculties, I was having to deal with the end of a relationship and reconfigure myself, but it never crossed my mind to give up and stop".

Yet this was a time of constant discovery and new ways of working, with Rose saying she'd no longer just sit around waiting for inspiration to strike, but took on the process of hard graft, going to the studio specifically to write and work - "You can't just live in your own self serving creative rainbow, and I started to really enjoy that aspect of working - it's your fucking job, show up for it". Gradually, this began to pay off: "As I got past the emotional vomiting that goes on and found the bits that were salient and pertinent, it started to work."

Initially Rose took all the material she'd written to her friend Oli Bayston, AKA producer Boxed In ("I chucked him all this shit," as she puts it) but he suggested starting from scratch, something that she now says was liberating: "I had a lot of songs that were millstones". These shattered, the pair started working with small ideas, a simple rhythm, drum noises, or a sound on a Korg Delta, trying to find what Rose describes as the "essential" part of her songwriting: "If we found one little phrase and tried to develop it as much as possible without adding more things, how much can we get out of these initial ideas, and milk them for all they're worth". The plan was to make the record from a limited sonic palette, to give everything a defined aesthetic. This stretches back from the days in The Pipettes, who were after all based on a manifesto for the perfect pop group by the KLF's Bill Drummond. The songs started coming quickly, and it was album opener 'Colour Of Water' where Bayston and Dougall felt that they knew they had something special, setting the tone for the rest of the album which followed in a little under three months. 'All At Once' in particular is the sound of Rose pushing herself out of her comfort zone. A co-write with Sean Nicholas Savage who turned up at the studio with a "bizarre little refrain" that at first was intended to be a sweet song, but ended up darker and stranger and fit with a desire "to make some modern music".

As fits the location of its writing, Rose says that Stellular is a more urban record, though this comes with a curious twist: "while making the record I could only hack a few weeks at a time in the city, so I'd go and visit my mum, who lives in the woods near to where Brian Jones died and AA Milne lived. There's a lot of references to wanting to be out of the city and enduring London, because this is a really hard place to be. A lot of the lyrics I wrote whilst on this one walk I did a lot, that takes about an hour and a half. When I think of this record I think of myself doing that walk on my own".

Yet it was London lives that shaped the lyrics of Stellular, and the experiences of Rose's friends as their 20s slipped by in a haze of late nights, broken hearts and struggles in an increasingly unforgiving capital. "the last decade in this country has been a really fucking weird time to be young. There's a theme of promises that are falling apart, and negotiating the wreckage of choices you might make that actually start to become less flippant and do have long-standing effects on your future".

It's some of Rose's favourite female artists who have inspired this attitude. "I want it to be human, I want it to be honest. There's always going to be artifice within these things, but even just one line in one song can find the kernel of something more," she says. "That's what I aspire to make, like so many of the women I love, like Karen Dalton or Joni Mitchell or PJ Harvey or Roisin Murphy or Beth Gibbons, they're serious artists but there's a humanity to it all". It stems too from her frustration that female musicians "are expected to have an angle before there's even any music, and that's something I've really resisted - you can be the fey, elfin siren, or sexually aggressive, there are these tropes that you can fulfill, and I've never really found one". More honest, Rose believes, is to reflect herself and her friends, as they negotiate love, sex and living viscerally in modern London. "These are the women that I spend my time with," she says, "I'm inhabiting the people around me and it's a reflection of that, of the women I know in their 20s, and that's in my music".

In her honest clarity Rose Dougall has captured ten years of falling apart and picking herself up again explored in new ways of writing her way through the pop song. "Music is the reason for all the other bullshit!" she says, "Sometimes it doesn't serve you, and you have to deal with that, but when it does, it makes sense of everything. I just want to keep moving, and hopefully music can provide that - it's why I do it all the time. I'm still really romantic about the whole thing, and I still find it really magical. Through this album I feel I've found my truest voice, for now".

Luke Turner