Why do some artists become icons of pop culture?

According to Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, “pop culture” means “music, films, and products etc. in a particular society that are familiar to and popular with most ordinary people in that society”. Likewise, “artist” means “someone who produces art, especially paintings or drawings” or “a professional performer, especially a singer, dancer, or actor”. Why do some artists become icons of pop culture? For me, generally speaking, those artists are supported by giant enterprises and are extremely influential among teenagers.

As far as I am concerned, there are several reasons for pop culture icons forming. Firstly, most artists that become pop culture icons are backed by giant enterprises. Secondly, pop culture icons can also be naturally formed through societal forces and changes. Last but not least, social forces that turn artists into icon for change and protest.

Above all, most artists that become pop culture icons are backed by giant enterprises. Most of artists want to be supported by giant music companies like Sony Music, Universal Music, and other international music companies. These companies are worth multi-billion dollars and can support campaigns and distribution of the artist's music. It is quite difficult for small artists to become famous without substantial financial support, and talent alone is not enough. For instance, Britney Spears is backed by Radio Corporation of America; Beyoncé is from Columbia Records; David Bowie, The Beatles, Kylie Minogue, Sarah Brightman, Spice Girls, Coldplay etc. are supported by EMI Group; Lady Gaga, Mariah Carey, Justin Bieber, Bon Jovi, Eminem, Rihanna, Amy Winehouse, Madonna, U2, ABBA, Bee Gees, etc. are backed by Universal Music.

Secondly, pop culture icons can also be naturally formed through societal forces and changes. For example, Rock & Roll music were evolved as a music that protested against the war in Vietnam, and for world peace.

Lastly, social forces that turn artists into icon for change and protest. Take Lady Gaga as an example. At her beginning period, she was leading the trend of pop music. However, at that stage, she was not called as “Icon” but just “pop star”. The reason is that her music did not mention social issues that much. Nevertheless, situation started to change when her single *Born This Way* was released. She wrote and sang “Whether you're broke or evergreen / You're black, white, beige, chola descent / You're Lebanese, you're orient / Whether life's disabilities / Left you outcast, bullied or teased / Rejoice and love yourself today / 'Cause baby, you were born this way / No matter gay, straight or bi / Lesbian, transgendered life / I'm on the right track, baby” in *Born This Way.* In this song, she expresses her attitude towards several discriminations. Apparently, she is on the side of equality of the mankind, which makes her poplar among LGBTQ people. Beyond that, we could also figure out that she wants to be influential not only in music but also all over the place. As we all known, art is a constant influence in Gaga’s work. Her Applause music video includes a segment where she appears on stage stripped of her costumes, wearing only shells. It’s heavily inspired by Botticelli’s Birth of Venus. Warhol’s pop art themes are played out in Gaga’s Telephone music video, where her makeup is almost identical to the iconic Marilyn portrait. Her fascination with art sparks artists’ fascination with her; Jeff Koons, a renowned sculptor, created a sculpture of her which she used for her Artpop album cover. She has created such a buzz in the art world that in 2010, the Chappe Gallery in Paris held a Lady Gaga exhibition that included the star’s portraits and clothes. Besides, you know you’re a household name when you get a guest spot on The Simpsons. She voiced herself for the finale of Season 23. She even appeared on Family Guy. But Gaga has gone beyond guest appearances: her self-love anthem Born This Way led to a 90 minute Gaga-themed episode on Glee, the melting pot musical drama-comedy hit. In addition, the tech giant Google got Gaga to call on her fans for videos of them covering her songs, and they spliced them together to create an ad for Google Chrome. The fact is, Gaga’s star power is so far-reaching, the world can’t contain her. Literally. In 2015, she is going to be the first person to perform in space. The singer is set to take off in a Virgin Galactic ship and sing during the Zero G Colony high-tech musical festival. What’s more, various liberal arts colleges have started teaching courses on the effect of Gaga in society. The fact that these are fully accredited colleges goes to show the impact she has had on society. University of South Carolina professor Mathieu Deflem was the first to introduce such a course, calling it “Lady Gaga and the Sociology of Fame.” Lady Gaga also educates people in a wider sense, with her activism for the LGBT community, speaking out on issues like the ‘Don’t Ask Don’t Tell’ policy. Her Born This Way Foundation is a non-profit organization focused on ending bullying and promoting acceptance. Moreover, Lady Gaga is usually a tastemaker in the fashion world: she goes where others wouldn’t dare. Like the Alexander McQueen lobster claw-like ‘Armadillo’ shoes that looked completely unwearable, but ended up being a talking point of her Bad Romance video. Even her wheelchairs are designer: she was seen on a night out in a Louis Vuitton wheelchair, and her 24-carat gold coated wheel-throne was custom designed by jewelry designer Ken Borochov of Mordekai. Gaga isn’t just a fashion icon for her little monsters to emulate, she is a muse to one of the biggest names in the game: Donatella Versace. The face of the Versace empire even tweeted about how inspiring Gaga is. [1]

In short, those artists who become icons of pop culture are supported by giant enterprises and are extremely influential among the society.

**Reference:**

1. http://www.bidnessetc.com/entertainment/lady-gaga-taken-world-presence-pop-culture/