

Vol. XVI, No. 24 11/23 to 12/6/92 (outside Calif. \$3.00, Canada \$3.50) \$2.50

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Annie Lennox



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Annie Lennox

By JON MATSUMOTO



In rock & roll, it's often assumed that a performer's onstage persona must reflect his or her off-stage personality. In many cases that assumption is an accurate one. For instance, there is little reason to doubt that the real Madonna and the real Axl Rose are that different from the personalities they project in their music and concerts.

But, in the case of Annie Lennox, what you see onstage is not necessarily what you get off-stage. As the lead singer of the Eurythmics, Lennox exuded the confidence and showmanship of a born entertainer. She was tough; she was, as one writer dubbed her, the Ice Princess.

However, in reality, the Scottish singer readily admits that she can be a bundle of insecurities. Indeed, she was so worried about the quality of her first solo album, *Diva*, that she seriously wondered whether it was worthy of public exposure.

"I had no expectations for this record whatsoever. In fact, I was even consider-

ing not giving it to the record company. Knowing my luck, I thought it would do dismally," reveals Lennox with a bit of a nervous chuckle.

We should all have such bad luck. *Diva*—released last April—recently reached platinum status in the United States. Propelled by the gorgeous ballad "Why," and her current hit, "Walking On Broken Glass," the album has put Lennox back on the pop map in a big way (all the more impressive, since the last two Eurythmics studio albums, *Savage* and *We Too Are One*, were disappointing works that went largely unnoticed).

"I suppose if *Diva* had been a dismal failure, I would have crept away into some sad corner somewhere and given myself up for lost," she says. "But, because it has had the recognition of commercial success, I feel...reaffirmed."

Lennox says making her first solo record was a "liberating" experience. She wanted to face the challenge of making her own album, but that doesn't mean it was an

easy or painless process.

"Although I worked closely with Steve Lipson, who produced the record, at times it was also frightening," states Lennox with a light Scottish accent. "To be alone in the writing situation with no one else to give you feedback is very challenging. It was something I decided to do, and I knew I had to grit my teeth and bear it.

"I had to expose Steve to a great deal of throwing my hands up in the air and washing my hands of it. Because I'm a great giver-upper—I always give up on things. I need someone to lead me to the grindstone. I suppose over the years they did that a lot with me—leading me to the grindstone."

In the Eurythmics, it was Lennox's partner Dave Stewart who helped motivate her. Together they produced some of the most inventive pop music of the Eighties. Lennox's commanding and soulful voice was a perfect match for the duo's eclectic songs, which included

synthesized Euro-pop ("Sweet Dreams [Are Made of This]"), rock ("I Need a Man") and R&B ("Would I Lie to You?").

At the duo's peak, the Eurythmics were built on a strong, co-dependent creative partnership between Lennox and Stewart. But as time marched on, Lennox says that working relationship began to grow predictable and stale. By the late Eighties, the duo's interaction had become tense and acidic, making it tough at times for them to even be in the same room together.

"After a while you sort of expect that he's going to do this and I'm going to do that," says Lennox. "We had done that too long. We both needed new challenges and new demands. I definitely wanted to put new demands on myself, otherwise you tread water and you never grow."

As the Eurythmics wound to a close, Lennox was also beginning to develop a strong family life away from music. In 1988 she married Israeli documentary filmmaker Uri Fruchtmann. At the end of that same year, Lennox gave birth to a still-born baby. But in 1990, the couple had a healthy girl, Lola, who Lennox says has changed and enriched her life beyond measure.

"I knew that I wanted to have a baby," says Lennox. "I had no guarantee that it would happen. Being a woman in my thirties, it was a strange time; it's a strange time for all women. It's kind of like you're either going to be able to lay that family foundation, or you're not. We just wanted to have a family. We wanted to live this life that didn't put Eurythmics first."

With a more balanced life to lead, Lennox says she feels far less pressure to conform to outside expectations. When she was in the Eurythmics, Lennox often felt compelled to live up to her public persona; to be that charismatic pop star.

"I've grown to understand that the person that I am is different from the persona that people perceive me as, and I don't need to hide that," states the London-based Lennox. "I don't need to create anything. I can just do what I do, and that's okay. I used to feel pressure to be that thing, which doesn't exist anymore. I have now distanced myself from that monstrous creation."

After some ten years in the public eye, Lennox still feels uncomfortable with

her own celebrity. And she spends much time trying to come to grips with the effect that type of public attention has on her own psyche. She describes encountering total strangers who know so much about the life of Annie Lennox as "surreal" and "completely mad."



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In that regard, Lennox and Madonna are diametric opposites. Madonna seems to feed off public attention; Lennox almost feels paralyzed by it. "I'm always sort of reviewing that—how I feel about her," says Lennox of Madonna, pop's master manipulator. "Sometimes I feel I'm being conned...sometimes it feels controversial...sometimes it feels artistic...but then it's not. I don't know. Musically, it

doesn't touch me. Certainly, I appreciate that she works incredibly hard at what she does. She's obviously obsessive with it. But I personally couldn't live under that glare of spotlight."

Yet, there is a connection between the two singers. Lennox—much like Madonna—was viewed as a fashion trend-setter in her days in the Eurythmics. Beginning with the "Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)" video, she helped make androgyny chic. In the ensuing years, she changed her look and fashion sensibilities with regularity. She moved easily and naturally from the girl with the closely cropped orange hair on the *Touch* album cover, to the sultry pin-up queen on the front of *Savage*. And few will forget the time Lennox showed up at the Grammy Awards as an Elvis impersonator.

Some cynics assumed that Lennox's ever-changing appearance was simply part of some premeditated scheme to sell records. Not so, says Lennox. "I've always changed the way I look. Even if I didn't have my picture taken, I would still change the way I look because it's natural for me to do that. It's not something that's a master plan."

But Lennox admits that her androgynous fashion sensibilities were a conscious rebellion against the traditional image of the ornamental rock & roll chick. She didn't want to be perceived as a vacuous boy toy.

"Cross-dressing had to do with sort of being conscious of how women are portrayed and how they portray themselves," recalls Lennox. "It was being aware from a very early stage that I wasn't that kind of clichéd singer. I wanted to do something else."

Lennox has not toured to support her new album and has no plans to do so anytime soon. These days family comes first. Recently, she announced that she's expecting a second child sometime in the spring. So it may be a very long time before Lennox fans will be able to catch her in concert.

And after hearing Lennox's description of life on the road and her own bouts with stage fright, it's unlikely she'll be experiencing any tour withdrawal symptoms. "I toured for a very long period of my life with the Eurythmics," she says. "It's like anything that you give a great deal to, you do get

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CERTAIN THINGS BACK. BUT I FOUND IT VERY EXHAUSTING, VERY LONELY AND VERY TOUGH. TO PERFORM LIVE NIGHT AFTER NIGHT, YOU HAVE TO HAVE THE MENTAL AND PHYSICAL PREPARATION OF AN ATHLETE. IT'S VERY CONFRONTATIONAL. I FEEL VERY EXPOSED. I HAVE TO DRAW ON ALL OF MY RESOURCES, LIKE A BOXER."

DESPITE HER STAGE FRIGHT AND HER INSECURITIES ABOUT HER OWN SONGS, IT'S UNLIKELY THAT ANNIE LENNOX WILL SOON LEAVE THE MUSIC BUSINESS AND COMMIT FULL TIME TO DOMESTICITY. WHEN SHE WAS PREGNANT WITH LOLA, SHE REALIZED THAT MAKING MUSIC WAS AN INTEGRAL PART OF HER AND THAT SHE COULDN'T IGNORE IT.

BUT, AT THE SAME TIME, LENNOX NO LONGER FEELS CONSUMED OR DRIVEN BY HER CAREER. SHE'S NOW READY TO LET THINGS HAPPEN NATURALLY. "I DON'T THINK IT'S POSSIBLE TO WORK AND WORK AND WORK," SHE EXPLAINS. "I WILL GO WHERE MY FANCY TAKES ME. AT A CERTAIN POINT, WHEN I HAVE THE URGE AND THE NOTION TO START TO APPROACH WRITING A NEW RECORD, I'LL DO IT. YOU SEE IT TAKES A TOTAL INVOLVEMENT. IT'S NOT SOMETHING I'M GOING TO JUMP INTO DIRECTLY AFTER *DIVA*, BECAUSE IT'S SO PSYCHOLOGICALLY DEMANDING. MAKING RECORDS HAS A LOT TO DO WITH THE REEVALUATION OF YOURSELF. YOU NEED THAT TIME TO BE JUST QUIET FOR A WHILE." **MC**