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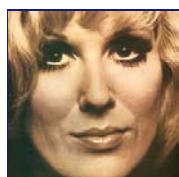
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Where am I going?



Posted - 10/06/2008 : 18:46:09



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Another long full version interview from what is turning out to be a treasury on my PC. Sharon Davis's book on Dusty comes out later this year. At the end of the interview Dusty talks about the "stratospheric notes" she achieves on Dusty in Memphis'. This is the first time (or maybe my memory is falling) I've seen this acknowledged by Dusty herself. It's true she never did achieve this kind of intense focus again. These notes are just there as a matter of course it seems. There's no grandstanding.

"Blues & Soul
1990

DUSTY FROM THE SOUL

Sharon Davis reminisces with black music fan Dusty Springfield--
taggedBritain's "white negress"

What's this lady doing in Blues & Soul, you may ask yourself. Well, read on because this petite, much loved and respected singer was one of the forerunners in spreading the word--the Motown word, the soul word--although she's always claimed her promotion of the music was a modest contribution to its growth and popularity in Europe.

So, here we were, sipping diet coke, lounging in The Churchill Hotel late one Tuesday night, when Dusty Springfield--dressed in soft spring colours, with her large expressive, mascara-ed eyes and long pink fingernails flashing to emphasise a point--was an absolute treasure as we sauntered down a musical memory lane.

The two hour journey wasn't without interruption ("Can't you see I'm trying to do an interview here!!") but nonetheless she persevered and perhaps spent a little longer talking than originally intended.

Black music lovers will recall Ms Springfield's two critically acclaimed 1969/1970 albums Dusty in Memphis and A Brand New Me (UK--From Dusty . . . With Love), her regular involvement with the racey, innovative Friday night music TV programme Ready Steady Go, hosting "The Sound of Motown" and her participation in an American Motown Revue. And naturally some of these came into the conversation.

However, before getting into these "rather heady days," Dusty spoke of her current soul favourite, Luther Vandross. "He's a master at making the most of a song" she gushed. "Sometimes he decorates too much, but that's Luther."

"If I wanted to do very soulful things now, I don't think I would. I have influences but I don't think I'd try to do that here. We have our own ways. I think bands like Soul II Soul are soulful but in a different way; it's that wonderful mixture of sounds which I couldn't do. The closest I come to this on my new album [Reputation released this month] where I sound free and happy is on "Send It To Me". It has a slight wit to it and kinda lopes along; it's also very sparse. What you have is a Womack & Womack quality. It's simplicity and was a reaction to a lot of complicated stuff. I just wanted a song that was straight ahead."

It was over two decades ago when Dusty first flew her Motown crusading flag; she promoted the music in interviews, performed cover-versions on TV and recorded the company's tracks on albums. Why Motown?

"It was so obviously better than a lot of things that were happening. They were really good songs done extremely rhythmically. It was the first time there had been that type of song structure. Some of them were sloppy but it was this sloppiness that made them attractive. I noticed a lot of it was to do with the bass player, the drummer's licks, Holland, Dozier and Holland, and musicians like James Jamerson if you were lucky! That was the 'motor' of Motorcity. You could put anything on top of it and it would still sound like Motown.

"The artists were probably secondary, and certainly there were a lot of people who sang but who didn't last. Whether it was because they got worn out by the situation, I don't know. They were talented and certainly you could put all sorts of vocal people over an absolutely splendid bass line and have a hit."

Her love of this music inevitably got her into trouble, particularly with British musicians in the studios. "I was swiping things left, right and centre to record, wasn't !! It was pretty phenomenal to get that sound because the guys I had to work with--they were all sweethearts [she smiled]--but they were all playing standard basses. I was actually the first person to ask them to play a Fender bass. I really was a stickler for just getting there, just as close as I could, and that's where my reputation came from because I kept saying 'no, that's not it' and so on."

Despite Dusty's close involvement with the artists, nobody asked her to join Motown, a move, she said, that wouldn't have been right at the time. "The climate wasn't right. I would have been intimidated because I was in awe of them and I don't sing well when I'm in awe. I usually sing better in England. A few white singers did try it and they didn't last . . . Chris Clark, Kiki Dee . . . I think Motown was right not to ask me. In retrospect, I'm glad they didn't because I might have accepted, and I wanted to stumble along on my own, make my own blunders."

Mid way through the Sixties, the lady flew to America to join a touring Motown Revue comprising some of the company's finest like Martha and the Vandellas, The Supremes, The Temptations and Marvin Gaye, under the auspices of deejay Murray the K.

"I remember it was the era of Beatlemania and Murry the K liked to consider himself as the fifth Beatle. He thought I was from Liverpool and decided he'd got to have me! There were a couple of other white acts on the show, I think Jay and the Americans were there . . . Murry hedged his bets with a few white acts.

"I mostly hung out with The Ronettes who, as you know weren't Motown, and shared a dressing room with them, which was an extraordinary experience! Y'know, it was like 104 degrees in this very, very small dressing room, and all our beehives were in there--three black beehives and one white one! It was collisions constantly!

"Next door were Martha and the Vandellas, and the other side The Supremes. I remember Mary Wilson was always reading Latin books and Diana Ross' mum helped me turn my hems up because I was always buying things that were too long! I had a lot of good times, very heady times being involved in that period. After all, what could be more stimulating than listening to the brass arrangements of The Temptations from the side of the stage. That was heaven to me. Mind you, I didn't like performing there or anything else but I wanted to stand at the side of the stage and soak it all up so that I could use it.

"But I could never get anyone to do it! And this is where I got this priceless reputation of being difficult in the studios over here because I was always asking the musicians to do things they couldn't understand."

Apart from performing on this tour, Dusty became one of Martha's Vandellas. The blonde singer laughed--"We started the show at ten in

the morning and it went on until one/two the following morning. We only sang two or three songs each but it meant being in the theatre all the time, and there was always a Vandella missing! Since they were singing back-up for Marvin Gaye from the wings, I used to do it. I never actually got to go on stage with them but I knew exactly how to sound like a Vandella . . . and a Shirelle if it came to that. I know how to do that stuff to this day. I can still go off into my Shirley Alston impression. Whoever it was I wanted to be, I'd slavishly copy them because we hadn't caught on to them in this country so I could get away with it."

Her involvement with and influences from black music showed so dramatically in Dusty's recordings (check her first album *A Girl Called Dusty* and) that she was nicknamed "The White Negress" by her contemporaries, a name that surely should have flattered her.

"I certainly wasn't offended" she smiled, trying to get her lighter to ignite, before adding "In fact I don't think it had any impact on me at all." However, the title did cause a lot of resentment and she cited one instance. "It's not much fun having a glass of whisky thrown in your face by Nina Simone who called me a honky and resented me being alive! She was having a few problems which I thought I could solve by being nice. Huh, I was still as naive as ever! I was on a crusade of being helpful to people who had problems and I was warned not to approach her but . . . I knew better, didn't I?"

Ms Springfield might have resisted joining Motown but she did sign with Atlantic Records to release the two previously mentioned superb albums. Ahmet Ertegun heard "Some Of Your Lovin'" and begged her to record for Atlantic once she was contractually free. Dusty said the albums were largely recorded from fear as she remembered her first visits to the studios.

"I got destroyed when someone said 'stand there, that's where Aretha stood' or 'stand there, that's where Percy Sledge sang "When A Man Loves a Woman."' I became paralysed by the ghosts of the studio! I knew that I could sing the songs well enough, but it brought pangs of insecurity . . . that I didn't deserve to be there. I just knew that Aretha's drummer was going to say 'ain't she a piece of sh*t.' It's the most deflating thing you can say to me that somebody I adore and worship actually stood there and probably delivered an effortless performance while I'm slogging away trying to get it right. They meant well but they didn't realise what they were doing."

Yet, after playing the albums again, the fear brought out some of the finest tracks Dusty has recorded, and probably is likely to. She agreed. "It's funny because I hated those sessions. But the albums do say everything about the patience those guys had. They worked with me until they got it out of me. Probably the irony of those whole sessions was that I was so crippled with laryngitis they could only record me two or three words at a time. Yet, there are notes on the albums that I've never sung again, they're stratospheric. They're so high. I'd be revving up and I'd just go for it. When I didn't make it I'd do it again until I did. It was rough!"

Rough or not, I bet she loved every damned minute."

Memphis

Ever since we met...

memphisinlondon

Where am I going?



Posted - 11/06/2008 : 00:20:33



It's just been pointed out to me that I probably cut and pasted this Blues and Soul piece from Michael Bayley's site which is the best biography and resource out there. I would have done this back in 2000. Anyway, if you want to read more check Michael's site and please treat these posts as an advert (I included this first link a while back in the new books section).

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Here's the link for the articles:

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Memphis

Ever since we met...



mssdusty
I've got a good thing
★★★★★

Posted - 11/06/2008 : 10:03:04

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MARY



THE LOOK OF LOVE IS IN YOUR EYES!
Watch my video with Dusty on YouTube!



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