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allherfaces

Administrator



Posted - 21/02/2007 : 17:44:04



USA
14235 Posts

The article below was published in The Independent last February. I thought it would be fun to put it under the Getting It Right section so that members could correct any errors within. (But feel free to move it elsewhere if you like.)

Devoted To Dusty: Return of the much-missed white lady of soul
She was one of the biggest stars of the 1960s. But Dusty Springfield was a woman in turmoil. As Ang Lee plans a film of her life, Lucy O'Brien remembers the white lady of soul

Published: 25 February 2006

She had an iconic image - blonde bouffant, panda eyes and designer dresses - and a husky vibrato that resonated on a stream of hits like "You Don't Have To Say You Love Me", "Goin' Back", and "Son Of A Preacher Man". But until her death in 1999 at the age of 59, Dusty Springfield was generally written off as a faded 1960s has-been.

After she was buried at a quiet ceremony in Henley-on-Thames, the accolades poured in. The Queen said that she was saddened, and stars including Cher, Elton John and the Pet Shop Boys paid tribute to Dusty as one of the finest female vocalists of her generation. Neil Tennant and Chris Lowe said: "She brought pleasure to millions of music lovers around the world. She will be sadly missed." It was as if Britain had only just realised what a unique singer it had lost.

Now, seven years later, Dusty-mania is officially upon us. Along with an ever-increasing appetite for her music, the award-winning director of Brokeback Mountain, Ang Lee, is to direct a biopic of the singer, with rumours of Charlize Theron in the lead role and Kate Moss playing her first lover. The appeal for the director of the emotionally complex gay cowboy film is clear - behind Dusty's sparkling exterior was a closet lesbian who fought depression and addiction to drink and drugs. It was this struggle that gave her that "difficult" reputation, and obscured her talent for years.

I interviewed Dusty in the late 1980s when I was working on the first edition of my biography. She was thoughtful, with a warm sense of humour and a pragmatic appraisal of the music business. She was in the process of moving back to England, describing Los Angeles - her home for 15 years - as "part naff, part glamorous". She added, "Musically Americans get frightened if you fling a lot of stuff at them. Playing different styles makes them nervous. Besides, I've been homesick for a long time. I've been waiting for the groundswell of movement in Britain, and now seems the right time to come back." With her penchant for epic ballads and raw American soul, Dusty always was ahead of her time. In the 1960s she rejected the notion that female pop vocalists should look pretty and sing sweet. While other beat girls like Cilla Black and Sandie Shaw veered towards girl-next-door pop, Dusty injected a wayward energy into a UK scene stifled by mainstream light entertainment.

For a white, suburban convent girl from High Wycombe, her influences were unusual - ranging from the vaudeville blues mama Bessie Smith to the eccentric jazz artist, Blossom Dearie. An earthy, anarchic approach to life pulsed through that decorous Home Counties exterior. She was assertive at a time when women were expected to toe the line. She was hard on musicians who didn't come up to scratch, but kept those she felt genuinely wanted to help her. "Those who would play for me standing up if they had

plies, which is what a drummer did for a week at the Talk of the Town - and he drummed beautifully," she once said.

Perhaps one of her greatest achievements was inventing that look - the impossible beehive, the smudged eyes, the glittering gowns. In true diva style, she had a succession of wigs that she named Cilla, Sandie and Lulu, and a host of gay fans who appreciated the fact that she modelled herself on drag queens. During a Gay Liberation march in the late 1960s, for instance, about 20 gay men led the parade dressed up as Dusty. "She should have been an old-style movie star," her Sixties manager, the late Vic Billings, told me. "Someone like Greta Garbo, wanting to be alone and languishing in her bedroom all day, maybe reaching over for the occasional chocolate." Though friends said she could be "as temperamental as hell", she also exuded the graciousness of a Southern belle.

Despite the flamboyant image, Dusty described her inner self as a "boring librarian". Born Mary O'Brien in 1939 to an accountant and a spirited Irish housewife, Dusty was a plump, bespectacled schoolgirl. By all accounts she had an unhappy childhood, with her parents caught in a loveless marriage. With a sense of reinvention Madonna would be proud of, the teenage Dusty dyed her hair blonde, donned a pair of high heels, and joined the Lana Sisters, a merry 1950s female trio who sang novelty jazz tunes.

From there she formed The Springfields with her brother Tom, a folk/pop group that became national favourites with songs like "Island of Dreams" and "Silver Threads and Golden Needles". At the peak of their success in 1963, she left to go solo, immediately scoring a hit with "I Only Want To Be With You". She became a staple on the mod TV show, *Ready Steady Go*, and championed a new US label fresh out of Detroit called Motown. "She was the soul singer. Out of all the girls - Lulu, Cilla and all of that - it was Dusty doin' it for me. She made me feel it. She had the vamp," remembers P P Arnold, a former Ikette who sang back-up on many of Dusty's records.

While she appealed to the mod cognoscenti, Dusty was also popular with a mainstream family audience. She topped the charts throughout the 1960s, and hosted her own TV shows. But by the end of the decade, she felt stifled by her status as a household name. She jealously guarded her private life, terrified that the press would discover she was a lesbian. Being an openly gay pop singer then was tantamount to commercial suicide - as the late Jackie Forster, gay activist and actress, recalled: "Being a lesbian was not seen as a nice thing. We'd been fed this dreadful misinformation about what lesbians were, and how we always lurked around lavatories or railway stations to pick up poor defenceless women. People were terrified of being found out at work, and there was tremendous self-oppression."

The gay scene for women was non-existent apart from the club Gateways, immortalised in the film *The Killing Of Sister George*, which Dusty frequented sometimes with her girlfriends. "At Gateways they'd play her records all the time, along with Doris Day and Julie Andrews," said Forster. "We adored Dusty. Everybody bought her records, especially 'You Don't Have To Say You Love Me'. Dusty was attractive to us because she was a glamorous singer and a lesbian. I think even if she'd sung crap we'd have still loved her, because even though she never imposed it, or mentioned it, she was our role model."

Dusty was more outspoken on the issue of racism. Many of her friends in America, including the Motown artist Martha Reeves, were supporters of the civil rights movement. The first British artist to include a "no apartheid" clause in her contract, Dusty was deported from South Africa in 1964 for refusing to perform before segregated audiences. Her stance caused an uproar in the Commons. "We never realised it would cause so much fuss," remembered Billings. "It was horrendous and frightening." Dismayed to be pilloried for standing up for her beliefs, Dusty cried for days after the deportation.

She became a magnet for tabloid rumour. By the end of the Sixties, speculation about her sexuality reached fever pitch, and she escaped to America. Her move was spurred by the success of *Dusty In Memphis*, an album she recorded in the US with the Atlantic Records dream team of Jerry Wexler, Arif Mardin and Tom Dowd. Released in 1969, it was a Southern soul selection that has since become a classic.

Dusty thought she could break America with her brand of "blue-eyed soul", but people couldn't understand an English white woman trying to sound like

Aretha Franklin. She was steered towards the Vegas-style supper club circuit, which for her was a living death. This was the start of a downward spiral. Dusty sang less and less, retired to her home in Laurel Canyon, and anaesthetised herself with a combination of vodka, Mandrax and cocaine. By the early 1980s she was near-bankrupt and given to self-harm.

It took many bouts of rehab and Alcoholics Anonymous meetings before she found her equilibrium. In 1987 she was ready to try again, and recorded "What Have I Done To Deserve This?", a duet with the Pet Shop Boys that propelled her back into the nation's consciousness. She made two more albums, 1990's Reputation, and A Very Fine Love in 1995, but had to stop work when the breast cancer she thought she had beaten in the early 1990s returned. She fought the disease, retaining her sense of humour to the end. Sometimes she would stop the ambulance ferrying her home from the Royal Marsden Hospital to get out and go shopping. Then when she received her OBE in her hospital bed shortly before her death, she quipped: "It's a nice medal. But couldn't they have got a better ribbon? It's a bit frayed."

Towards the end of her life she found a new sense of peace. "I am a woman of a certain age," she said, after recording A Very Fine Love. "I'm comfortable with that and want to reflect it in my music." It's that gentle poise and panache that will be remembered, along with a voice full of vulnerability and emotion - "the Irish melancholy in me" - that always told a story. She is still sorely missed, but Ang Lee's film will introduce her to a whole new generation, and keep her sound alive.

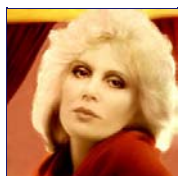
Lucy O'Brien's biography, 'Dusty', is published by Pan/Macmillan

Let's Shop Dusty!

USA: <http://astore.amazon.com/lestadu-20>

UK and EU: <http://astore.amazon.co.uk/letadu-21>

Tim
Where am I going?
☆☆☆



United Kingdom
3422 Posts

Posted - 24/02/2007 : 21:02:21

Thanks Nancy - I enjoyed reading that.

T x

Corinna
Forum Admin
☆☆☆☆☆



Sweden
6080 Posts

Posted - 24/02/2007 : 22:42:55

Thanks for posting this one, Nancy!

Actually, just a couple of weeks ago, a friend asked me whatever how the Ang Lee-Dusty movie was coming along. I had forgotten about it...

Cor xx

MattMidd1
I've got a good thing
☆☆☆☆☆

United Kingdom
4270 Posts

Posted - 24/02/2007 : 22:45:24

I really can't wait for the movie. Does anyone know anyone know any more about it?

Matt.

23 weeks; then a different country, here I come!!

Teda
Little by little
★

Posted - 26/02/2007 : 23:13:06

Thank you Nancy who wrote this article? They love to put her business in

USA
384 Posts

the street. Love Teda. I'll be the first to tell you Matt if they do a movie. You guys will be able to see the play in Oct. 2007. Matt the're trying to do the Janis Joplin story for the 3rd groupe of people. I was up for the Rose for 10 years, I lost it to Bette, because she was known, and I was the unknown known. So it takes alot of getting the right thing together. My friend who started Big Brother, is going to be consultant, (for little pay)but he already is having problems with producers and money. So it takes alot of time Matt. Love Teda xx



paula
Moderator
★★★★★

Posted - 27/02/2007 : 01:41:08



Hi Teda,
do you know..who is the latest actress to play Janis?...there have been so many starts & stops on a JJ movie for awhile that it will be interesting to see it finally happen.
paula x



USA
5012 Posts

Teda
Little by little
★

Posted - 27/02/2007 : 03:07:28

USA
384 Posts

Hey Paula her name is ZooeY. Go to you tube put in her name. You will get her, but she doesn't sound right. There suppose to go into the studio and recut some songs, from Cheap Thrills. So Sony we'll be out of the picture.
Teda xx



Teda
Little by little
★

Posted - 27/02/2007 : 04:11:47

USA
384 Posts

She hasn't recorded anything. Her last name is Deschanel, Paula. Teda xx



dusty_freak
I've got a good thing
★★★★★

Posted - 27/02/2007 : 13:13:03



Oh wow i never knew ZooeY Deschanel could sing 🤩

Clare xoxo

"It's marvellous to be popular, but foolish to think it will last..."



Australia
5805 Posts

allherfaces
Administrator
★★★★★

Posted - 27/02/2007 : 15:15:27



That article is by Lucy O'Brien, one of Dusty's biographers.

Matt, when I posted this, I said look for the error/s--that rumor about an Ang Lee movie starring Charlize was a total rumour with no truth whatsoever.

Maybe a different thread to discuss Janis Joplin and related movies?

USA
14235 Posts

XO
I wanna be a mooovie stah!

We're here for Dusty...
<http://www.dustyspringfield.info>



MattMidd1
I've got a good thing
★★★★★

Posted - 27/02/2007 : 16:42:43

United Kingdom
4270 Posts

oh okay... I'm too stupid for that kind of task.

Matt.

22 weeks; then a different country, here I come!!



allherfaces
Administrator
★★★★★

Posted - 27/02/2007 : 18:17:56



XO
I wanna be a mooovie stah!

We're here for Dusty...
<http://www.dustyspringfield.info>

USA
14235 Posts

Teda
Little by little
★

Posted - 27/02/2007 : 18:27:20

USA
384 Posts

Thank you Nancy, I read the book and went right over it. I missed her name right in the article. Marve gave me the book and I said is there bad stuff in there? He said this is better. You see I didn't like reading stuff to blunt. Matt I can't do it either your not stupid. Infact you amuse me. Love Teda
XX



MattMidd1
I've got a good thing
★★★★★

Posted - 27/02/2007 : 18:48:59

United Kingdom
4270 Posts

Nice to know that thanks Teda. 😊 lol - I got to excited and just read the artical and not what you wrote.

Matt.

22 weeks; then a different country, here I come!!



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