

Rolling Stone



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BEFORE CYNDI LAUPER WAS a solo artist – before the blue eyeliner, Captain Lou and those “whoa-whoa-whoas” on “We Are the World” – she fronted the rockabilly-tinged band Blue Angel. Lauper didn’t initially make the connection between that experience and the country classics she covers on her strong new album, *Detour* – which continues the roots journey she began with 2010’s *Memphis Blues*. (In between, she wrote music for the Broadway hit *Kinky Boots*.) But after struggling her way through a Nashville session that “absolutely sucked,” she tried Wanda Jackson’s 1961 track “Funnel of Love,” and experienced some déjà vu. “I said, ‘Oh, wait a minute,’” Lauper recalls. “I know my way around this wheelhouse! This is what we used to do!” And I dived right in.”

You’re trying all sorts of new musical things lately. What is that about for you?

I always felt like I missed out, because I was so busy being famous I couldn’t go and experiment on all these things that everyone else did. For God’s sake, I never even moved to New Orleans to write an album like Rickie Lee Jones did [recently].

You have an intense version of Skeeter Davis’ “The End of the World” on the new album – what were you drawing on emotionally?

I remembered what it was like to me in 1988 or 1989, when I felt my whole world fall apart. They started to let people go at my label, Epic, and you become emotionally attached to those people. And the new guy is asking, “What the fuck is the matter with you, why you gotta dress like that, can’t you dress like Katrina and the Waves?” And I broke up with my fiancé around that time – all that bullshit of having your personal life in public. That sucks.

Would you rather be an up-and-coming pop star now or in the Eighties?

It’s harder now. I would have never done well on *The Voice* or *American Idol*, because I wouldn’t want to listen to somebody telling me what the fuck to do. I needed to go out in a very tangible place like clubs and perform and see, “Oh, that doesn’t work, this works.”

All of that work led me to *She’s So Unusual*, where we were arranging all these songs to get a sound that was part reggae, part classic pop, with a big voice, plus this electronic drum sound that was so exciting. Nowadays, there’s a lot of other stuff to mix together, and

Q&A



Cyndi Lauper

The pop legend on her new country album, hanging with Lady Gaga, and how she feels about Donald Trump now

BY BRIAN HIATT

it’s exciting too. But what is the road map to success?

Did you ever worry your style and persona were overshadowing your music?

The suits would say to me, “Your image is so big, I can’t hear you sing.” But those are corporate people who don’t understand performance art. There was a time, around the early Nineties, when they kept telling me, “Your true colors should just shine from the inside,” and I got plainer and plainer and plainer. I looked at myself in the mirror and said, “Who the fuck are you?” I think I was floundering. When I met Lady Gaga [in 2009], I think I woke up. “I’ll have freaking colored hair when I want!”

Your Queens accent is one of your trademarks, but you’ve also taken flak for it. Ever try to lose it?

Even on *Celebrity Apprentice*, people would say how funny I talked – then they’d start talking like me. I figured that’s probably what was upsetting to them – they were afraid I was contagious! I worked on it in college, and they taught me you have to relax your face, slow down, and your accent would be less and less. But I’m in a hurry!

As an *Apprentice* veteran, what do you think of a potential Trump presidency?

Of course, you’re going to ask me a fucking political question. At the time I said he seemed nice because he had nice children, and that I wish I was so smart that I could get people to work that stinking hard and just show up and wave and say, “OK, you’re fired!” But you don’t go on TV as a presidential candidate and talk about the size of your hand. You don’t do it. It’s so fucking juvenile and stupid. You think I want that person next to that red button? I don’t freaking think so.

In your memoir, you talk about sexism you faced in the industry and the world. Do you think it’s gotten any better?

Oh, come on! Look at what’s happening in the world! Give me this day my daily break! Look at politics. When Hillary was first running, I saw in an airport store a fucking nutcracker with Hillary and her legs as the nutcracker. And now this woman’s being held to all kinds of standards: “Oh, she doesn’t smile that much! Oh, I don’t like the clothing she wears! Oh, she did this.” And every other motherfucker was doing the same thing. I am sick and tired of seeing the boys’ club. So it’s Hillary over Bernie for you?

Well, yeah! Because I know the rich people aren’t going to pay any more taxes. I’ll just pay a little more of what I’m already paying, and have a little less. ©

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