

MODERN

Annie Lennox Let your voice be heard

What is it that we like about a voice, that captivates us, that grips us and moves us? What makes a voice unmistakable and unforgettable?

Whatever it is, Annie Lennox has one of these unique voices. She has this warm, dark timbre which gently flows through our ear canals like honey being spread on bread. She has been described several times as “the greatest living white soul voice”. Annie Lennox has been using this voice for over a quarter of a century now. Not only to sing however, but above all to make the world a better place.

She was born Ann Lennox on Christmas Day 1954 in the Scottish city of Aberdeen. Even at a young age, she played piano, flute, sang in the choir and danced. At 17 she went to London and studied classical music at the Royal Academy of Music. She threw in the towel shortly before her exam. She was unhappy with the direction her life was going in. Various jobs followed. She repeatedly tried to make it as a singer, and even as a cabaret artist once. But recognition and success were a long time in coming. Annie sometimes worked in a bookshop, sometimes as a waitress in a restaurant. There, she finally met Dave Stewart, who, instead of ordering something from the bar, proposed. Although no wedding followed, the two became a couple and started making music together. Firstly in the moderately successful band The Tourists, and afterwards with a new band project, The Eurythmics. They became one of the acts of the 1980s. Yet neither here did great success come overnight. It was not until 1983, with their second album and the title track “Sweet Dreams (Are Made Of This)”, that they had their international breakthrough. At this time, Annie and Dave were no longer a couple. Annie met the Hare Krishna monk Radha Raman and was fascinated by his personality and spirituality. They married in 1984, but the marriage lasted only one year. Finally, while on tour in Japan in 1988, she fell in love with the Israeli filmmaker Uri Fruchtmann, who was there shooting a documentary about the band. Much changed when he came on the scene. While Annie’s life had been dominated by her career until that point, now her private life took center stage. When her musical collaboration with Dave Stewart also ended in 1990, Annie took some time off. Soon after, she had her first daughter, Lola.

With her focus on family life, her social commitment also increased. She started supporting Greenpeace and numerous charitable organizations such as Oxfam and Shelter, which helps the homeless.

“I respond to these issues because I feel passionately about them, and am drawn to get involved in whatever way I can. However having said that, I’d love to see more activism in all kinds of areas. There’s so much more that we can do if we decide to take an interest.”

In 1992, she stepped back into the limelight with her first solo album “Diva”, but continued to spend a lot of time with her family. Her second daughter, Tali, was born in 1993 and only two years later, in 1995, she released her next album. This time it was a collection of cover versions of some of her favorite songs, for example by Procol Harum, The Temptations, Neil Young, The Clash and Bob Marley. An illustrious mix, although this is not surprising, as she herself says that in terms of music, she thrives on variety.

“I’m like a sponge when it comes to music. If I connect with it, it goes deep. Even when I was very young, I was greatly influenced by everything I heard.”

And she hears a lot. Alongside Bob Marley, her favorite singers include Aretha Franklin, Dusty Springfield, Joni Mitchell, Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye, Smokey Robinson and Prince.

Her third solo album “Bare”, with which she went on a solo tour for the very first time, was released eight years later. In between however, after an almost ten-year break, in 1999 she and Dave Stewart reunited to form the Eurythmics once more. Again, the central theme in Annie’s life is evident in the song “I Saved The World Today” from the album “Peace”: She wants nothing less than to save the world. And so she continued doing good deeds: The profits from her subsequent world tour went in their entirety to Greenpeace and Amnesty International.

Also in 2007, her new album, “Songs Of Mass Destruction”, was released – a somewhat strange title. It includes songs such as “Dark Road” and “Lost”. She herself describes it as a very somber work. Yet so is her view of the world sometimes. A world full of poverty, injustice and cruelty. There is still much to do. And thus she makes a powerful plea on the album in the form of “Sing”. Inspired by a song troupe from the South African organization Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), which campaigns for free medication to treat HIV-infected people, she composed this song and, believe it or not, managed to get 23 female colleagues to join in and contribute. They include superstars like Madonna and Céline Dion, soul singers such as Gladys Knight, Faith Hill and Joss Stone, the Portishead singer Beth Gibbons, world music star Angélique Kidjo and Martha Wainwright, the sister of Rufus Wainwright.



Photography: Bryan Adams