

C L O S E U P O N

Annie Lennox

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his is the story of an admirable woman who has just turned 30. A classically-trained flautist, Scottish-born Annie Lennox has survived the slings and arrows of serious dues-paying in the music biz to achieve popular acclaim as a latter-day Vesta Tilley. A star-spangled success story.

Being in a band in the early 1970s is embarrassing to look back on, especially if, like Annie, you touted yourself and flute in post-hippy, longhair bands. Then began her partnership with co-Eurythmic Dave Stewart, and The Tourists were born.

By early 1978 they had achieved the distinction of being the group most reviled, at least in London, by the music press. In a time of PVC and body piercing, The Tourists (fronted by 'zany lady' Annie) erred too much on the tacky, camp side of glamour and their songs, strong on fluid harmonies and keyboards, sounded far too serious and concerned about the quality of musicianship.

Songs like *Blind Among The Flowers* and *The Loneliest Man In The World* set a dramatic precedent for their later output, but the song that put The Tourists in the top 30 was a cover of Dusty Springfield's / *Only Want To Be With You*.

The group split. Annie and Dave found themselves floundering in a post-record deal scenario that happens oh, so often. Big debts and seemingly spent credibility. Annie Lennox has spoken of this time as a slough of consuming despond where she would lie in a bed feeling wretched.

This is why she is to be treasured as a bundle of positive energy and determination. She went one better than coming back from the dead. She came back from *The Tourists*, goddess.

If you look to the cover of the first Eurythmics album on RCA (*In The Garden*, 1981), a point of transition for the band, you'll see strangely blurred photos. Annie has lost her shoes and looks like someone waiting for an early morning bus after an

all-night party. Her face seems swollen from crying and she is holding hands with Dave Stewart. Ready for the big jump.

This time round, they sorted out the business (coily christened 'D&A') first, and together set up a recording studio in a converted church in Crouch End. Then came the image. Dave retreated into the background, and Annie stopped looking like a left-over from Biba. She cropped her hair, sidled her lanky frame into a suit and *kerpow!*

The charm of the androgyne worked again. Annie became the sort of Ziggy Stardust you can take home to mother. Their sound became more strident and defined, and with the LP *Sweet Dreams*, they achieved a universal market crossover.

Seeing Annie perform live at this time was a vicariously exhilarating experience. She'd prowled the stage raunchily, revelling in the freedom of utility clothing, like someone who'd been let out of a cage after 10 years of confinement. Her powerful voice also found its medium and the group never looked back.

She also found the confidence to project her body in a tastefully erotic way, her archly masked features and immaculate collarbones greeting you on every street corner news-stand, and her classic bicep-flexing pose on the cover of *Touch* echoed the changing ideal for the female physique.

Muscles were coming in, but like Annie's, they were still tentative tendons, rippling across still-fragile bodies. Muscles of a ballet dancer rather than a power-lifter.

Annie, the orange-plumed 'transvestite' phoenix, had risen from the ashes of restrictive feminine fripperies and was held up as a new role model for women whose sexuality was in a state of wonder. The inevitable questions came. Was Annie gay? A lot of us kind of hoped so.

Although her affair with Dave Stewart was common knowledge (a relationship that was by now firmly platonic), maybe part of the



motivation behind her transformation was her desire to *come out*.

No it wasn't. Annie stoutly denied that she was a lesbian. While this in itself was not a betrayal of her playing with ambiguous images, these lines from a later duet with Aretha Franklin, the 'feminist' anthem *Sisters Are Doing It For Themselves*, seemed an unnecessary affirmation that although women can function equally with men, they're still (but of course) heterosexual:

*Now we ain't lay in 'plans
Cause a man still loves a woman
And a woman still loves a man.*

In 1984, the tacky glamour came creeping back in, this time in an obviously self-parodying manner. For the *Whose That Girl* video, Annie appeared in many guises—in Dolly Parton wigs, reeking of Hollywood style, but also skulking about dressed as a gypsy-ish male with mischievous facial hair pencilled in.

With *Here Comes The Rain*, it was all change again, with Annie appearing as a frail, flaxen-haired Mia Farrow lookalike. One sensed that beneath the success lurked an uneasy personality. Annie was the angel playing with our hearts and minds.

Then there was the mysterious marriage to a Krishna monk, who few

people actually saw. Annie was beating the classic retreat from the hurly-burly of the vile pop world and taking shelter in her inner self. Luckily, she handled it a lot better, style-wise, than The Beatles did.

The band's music became increasingly commercial, rock-orientated and mainstream. This was marked by the album *Be Yourself Tonight*, where they kicked in the jams, coming up with an overblown pastiche of Sly and The Family Stone, a long way from the mournful, psychedelic phasing of the first album.

Annie's voice had come to excel in vocal pyrotechnics, increasingly to the detriment of melody lines (as shown in the new album *Revenge*), and she became officially stadium material.

After a year, the Krishna monk couldn't take the pressure any longer and the couple were divorced. Now Annie Lennox seems to have achieved a kind of equilibrium. Her peroxide crop has grown into a chic, Grecian cap, she sports an Americanised line in glamorous sequins and black, but just you watch her as she performs in front of her all-star backing band.

The grim determination is still there and her personality retains its humane idiosyncrasy. All hail, Annie. A born fighter, not a rock star.