



Tokyo Rose Cyndi Lauper Abroad

Cyndi Lauper talks like Elmer Fudd's sister and sings like a boid. 'Girls Just Wanna Have Fun' was, lyrically and musically, the blueprint for everything Stock Aitken Waterman have ever done. Cyndi has made a really bad movie, *Vibes* and her new album, *A Night to Remember* has more polish than shine but hey, Cyndi likes wrestling and girdles and Paris and Tokyo, and let's face it, those are the things that really count in life.

If you ever ring *Rip It Up* and have the misfortune to be put on hold then you'll be treated to the worst "on hold" music in the world, a version of 'Home On The Range' that sounds like it's being played on a music box dying of emphysema. So it's curiously appropriate that when I ring up Tokyo to speak to Cyndi Lauper over

three thousand miles away the Tokyo hotel lady puts me on hold and I listen to their "on hold" tune — a version of 'Home On The Range' played on a music box dying of emphysema. Yup. The same version: *Ding ding ding-da-ding*. Room 1005 please.

Ms Lauper is sounding a little uptight when she answers the phone, her cool is a little forced. This, she confesses, is because she is self-conscious of her speaking voice, but after a few laughs the uptight Cyndi gives way to the lady who laughs kinda funny.

Cyndi is in Japan on a tour which will bring her to New Zealand very soon. The tour promotes her *A Night To Remember* album which lacks the spark of her previous two efforts but seems to be earning her accolades and bucks in the West at the moment, probably because its MOR-rock

leanings fit easily into the current trend of rocky power-pop *a la* Bon Jovi, etc. The ups and downs of the music industry are all pretty obvious, so we don't talk about it much. If you want to find what the album scores out of 10 then go read Q or something.

How are things in Japan, Cyndi?
"Good. I always feel quite at home here."

Do the Japanese think you're a typical American woman?
"No. Maybe, but I don't think so."

I heard that you once appeared in some Japanese TV commercials.
"I did some in 1988. I like the commercials over here and a lot of times they have nothing to do with the product — very abstract and surrealistic, I love that stuff. One I did, I was one of the statues on this pink,

primitive stage; I came alive and danced and sang. Then in the other I was a teacher, teaching myself Japanese."

You last acted in *Vibes* — were you surprised when it flopped?
"I knew what was coming! We got to the end of the script and never finished it. I did the best I could with what I did. There was a director's strike, and things happening like that. But I enjoyed it, it was a great experience. It opened up another door for me creative-wise — except I've always been conscious about my speaking voice. As I get excited my voice goes up higher and I sound like a little kid."

I liked your voice in the film, I thought it sounded great.
"Thankyou. But it was great to have a speech coach saying, 'No no no — lower.'"
Is yours a Brooklyn accent?
"No, I think it's Queens. Yep. Eveybody in Queens sorta sounds loike me ... well, not eveybody. Some are worse than me."

Did you grow up in Queens?
"Yeah, in a little town called Ozone Park. Appropriate, right?"
Sounds like a nice place.
"Yeah, a lotta spaced out people there."

Where do you live now?
"Sort of out of a suitcase. Really, it's a wild experience but after a while you become accustomed to it and it feels odd to stay in just one place."

Creatively, does travelling make it harder or easier?
"Um, it depends. If you make time for yourself, you can do creative things. But sometimes you can't."

Did you perform as part of the French Revolution Bicentennial party?
"No, I couldn't come in the end, so they cancelled it. (pause) I don't mean they cancelled *Bastille Day* ..."

They'd say: Cyndi Lauper can't come, the Bicentennial's off!
"Yeah! We can't go on! Nah, they just cancelled the concert."

You would have fitted in well with the parade.
"They had a parade?"

Jean Paul Goude designed a parade that went down the Champs Elysees — a steam train, women with fifty-foot ball-gowns, African dancers ...

"Oh my God. Well, see, I missed that. I shoulda gone. They have some great things in Paris. Tokyo is also a wonder city. There's a new little area I kinda like, it's sorta what Soho in New York used to be. And there's other place that has really good restaurants — it has this great yakatori restaurant. Yeah, I like those blue collar places."

Are you a professional shopper now?
"I used to be. But I don't have time for it now. Ha. That really seems like a sad thing to say. But shopping becomes more difficult: you have to get in and get out quick, wear a hat and glasses. You have to go off hours ..."

You wouldn't exactly blend in with

the Japanese locale, would you?
"No. Not really (giggles). No, the blonde hair thing is definitely a stand-out point here."

I hear it's very popular with the men in Japan.
"Men? With blonde hair?"

No, no: men like women with blonde hair.
"Ohhh. I don't know. That's what everyone says but, I dunno. There are some really gorgeous Asian women here. They don't ever seem to age. Beautiful. But blonde women ... I have to stop and think about that. I have a black spot on my head too, y'know."

Like on the cover of the album.
"Isn't that amazing? It's been this way for a long time now! A long time for these two hair colours, right? I just couldn't make up my mind, blonde or black, blonde or black, aww, I'll do both."

You're settling into one groove now.
"Yeah, one groove, two colours."

What's it like being so famous that you can't go into a store without being hassled?
"They don't really hassle you, they're just enthusiastic and appreciative. But I don't think of it like that. I usually go into a store, look around, say I want that, that and that, get it and go. It's a wild way to shop but y'know, when you shop you gotta throw down big and do it fast. You think about it later."

That sounds like a good approach to recording an album.
"I don't think like that when I'm making a record. I just write and see what develops."

Your new album, *A Night To Remember* seems a lot more planned than the other two.
"I really didn't know what I had with this one until I put it together, until I sequenced it. I went to Russia, came back with two songs, and they gave me the idea for the title ..."

What'd you get out of your songwriting trip to Russia?
"What did I get out of it?"

You know, personally. I don't mean cash or anything.
"Cash? Oh, you don't have to worry about that. I won't be making any cash from *that* excursion. (laughs) It was just out of love."

Were you going there to get away from your image and fame?
"Yeah, going back to being a writer and an artist and not this famous person who gets told by people, 'YOU KNOW HOW I SEE YOU — ??' When you become popular or famous there's always somebody saying 'WELL YOU SHOULD DO THIS'. But the reason you became popular in the first place is that you were being yourself."

Merchandising in the States is big business now. Look at *Batman*.
"Yeah, I didn't even go and see it because of that. I like the Prince song though. I think Prince is brilliant. He's quite a special artist. He hasn't been round the States for a while, he's been round Europe and Paris instead. I'm kind of a fan of his. I heard so many strange stories about

him that I've always been apprehensive about his music."

I think he's probably pretty straight up.
"Yeah, probably. You know, you can't believe everything you read, right? You should know that."

Yeah, I'm the one who has to think all that stuff up.
"I know. And you also have an editor who edits your work."

Not here. I edit my own stuff.
"That's good. (laugh) Tell 'em how you REALLY feel."

Your debut album impressed a lot of people because you really could sing.
"Yeah. You wind up doing a lot of things but really, I sing. Singing is what I really do. I like making videos too, I like the live videos. Each thing I do, I learn."

You were really good as a Chinese girl in the 'Hole In My Heart' video.
"That was hilarious. We laughed so hard on that. We were in hysterics. There's a version of that where they overdubbed my voice in Chinese."

Video seems like the perfect medium for a natural extrovert.
"An extrovert? Yeah, I guess I'm not shy am I? No. I don't come off as a very shy person? Underneath this I am a very shy person. Dig down deep — very shy! (laugh)"

You still into wrestling?
"Not any more. That was in 1985. You guys looked at me cross-eyed when I talked about it down there."

What, at the press conference?
"I was in Australia. Oh sorry, wrong country. I've never been to New Zealand. I'm kinda excited about going there."

The album's doing well here — it sounds very professional.
"I guess that's a compliment."

There's been people in other places who've said 'KNOW IT'S SO DIFFERENT!' (laughs) Whatever. I worked really hard on it. It's good that it sounds professional, you know, because if there's one thing that I am, it's professional. (giggle)"

I heard that Japanese audiences are very attentive and polite.
"They scream a lot, you know: (high voice) 'Siiiiiiiiiii!' They're sweet. Last night I went out to go in the car and like a whole bunch of 30 kids rushed me, and the police got in the way. With a crowd like that if you don't run or freak, you can calm people down. The cops made these kids line up in a line, a long line, and I was at the front signing autographs. I mean it was easier to get the autographs done that way, but, God ..."

What's it like singing to people in Japan?
"I speak a mix of pidgin Japanese and English. The other night I sang them this old Japanese song I'd learnt years ago, a love song, an old Peggy March tune. I looked at the band and said, 'I'll just do this one *Al Capella* [sic], guys. There I was, no shame. It'll be weird in New Zealand, singing to people who speak English. I won't know what to say."

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