

ANGELA McCLUSKEY BIO

by Nathan Larson

I could cite gushers like this: “The striking vocals of Angela McCluskey will make you remember the first time you heard Miles blow his horn or Billie sing the blues.” (Hits Magazine)
That’s not inaccurate. People bandy phrases like this around, but let it be known that Angela McCluskey is no less than the real deal.

Angela hails from Glasgow, Scotland; a lovely, scary town. Scarier still, she wasn’t exactly encouraged to become a vocalist. “I used to sing so I could stay up late,” says Angela. “I’d do ‘Summertime’ or something and then (my family would) throw me back in bed. Singing’s just not a big deal there, so nobody ever turns ‘round and goes, ‘You know what? You should sing when you grow up.’”

Nurtured thus, Angela went to London and found work as a publicist and then in the video department of EMI Records. But her true calling nagged at her.

“Though I’d sung backup for friends’ bands, singing was the last thing I thought I would do,” she says. “And I’d always wanted to sing - I figured I’d do it when I was 50, sing jazz or something. But it got overwhelmingly annoying that I wasn’t doing what I wanted to do. I was always making other people’s dreams come true and never really expressing myself. It was easier than doing my own work.”

So in 1991, Angela headed out to Hollywood.

“...I came to America and instead of saying, ‘I’m a film publicist,’ I just said, ‘I’m a singer.’ And the American Dream literally happened. I mean, I had to work hard, get a club show together and do a lot of stuff, but at the same time, over here you hear a lot more yes’s than nos. People say, ‘So you can do that? Let me see you,’ rather than, ‘Oh, get a life. Get a real job,’ which is very Scottish.”

In 1992, she and her friend Shark formed a band called The Wild Colonials. The group rapidly drew local and national attention and within the space of a year, went from their point of conception, an Irish Pub called Cafe Beckett, to the rarefied air of Geffen Records HQ. Two albums (1994’s “Fruit of Life” and 1996’s “This Can’t Be Life”) and much touring came of this, including 1997’s Lilith Fair road show.

During this period, Angela found the time to lend her voice to many film soundtracks, among other projects, and to work with an eccentric list of artists, including Dr. John, Cyndi Lauper, Deep Forest, Joe Henry, The The’s, Matt Johnson, and Triptych (featuring the two brilliant beauties Sara Sant’ambrogio and Lilli Hayden, as well as Angela’s husband, the singular Paul Cantelon.

Recently, Angela was a key collaborator with French group Télépopmusik, who enjoyed a solid European dance hit and US Mitsubishi television commercial with “Breathe.”

I came to know her while I was in the band Shudder To Think, in a fly-by-night hip-hop studio in New York. Her, in the pitch-dark behind dirty glass and a microphone, and me with my chin on the floor, knowing as one does that I was in the presence of something real in an industry of hacks and half-truths. I was forever sold.

On the first day that we met, we had discussed making an album. I think, though I was drunk. Maybe it was later. Regardless, many people talked about making “The Angela Record” with her; I just got there first.

It wasn't until she landed in New York in 2001, however, that the idea of working together started to look vaguely possible. Time passed though. I had quit my band and she was floating a bit. We were both busy with one thing or another. But at some point it occurred to us that we could just go for it. I had a studio in NYC and a place in Sweden. We didn't need to be watching clocks, we could create unmolested.

And so we did.

This record was written and recorded in Manhattan and Sweden. I remember bits and pieces, like a wonderful slow-mo car wreck...a paper plateful of dead tea-candles and cigarette burns; a bottle of Scotch propping up a page of hand-scrawled lyrics; the seismic basso-profundo of the train to Denmark as it passed within inches of our "studio" walls; Angela in a filthy kitchen with a broken guitar, playing the only chord she knows into a Dictaphone, singing something about a foreign place. The vocal for this night was nailed in one drunken post-midnight take. "Long Live I," my old place in Tribeca, sung towards the space where only three weeks before the Trade Centers had stood, sung for the ghosts and the dust.

We were flowing. The initial recordings were composed and committed to tape very, very fast, with no real regard for the technical aspects of a proper record. The folks at Manhattan Records however, had the foresight to take the album on in its raw, unfinished form. We then spent more time in NYC fixing stuff and adding bits here and there. But in essence, what you have here is what came out of us, direct from our dream-life. Angela and I were channeling something; perhaps colored by the cataclysmic period in which it was made, certainly limited by the dodgy, seat-of-our-pants working environments, but never second-guessed or compromised.

This is a record about sex, death, joy, fear, love, pain, and beauty, delivered by one of the most exquisite modern voices. We're thankful to have made it, and hope you enjoy Angela McCluskey's Manhattan Records debut.

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