



You gotta let me know: Ellen Foley with Micky Jones.

# Flying colours

This month's neglected pearl: Meat Loaf's duet partner meets The Clash in London N5.

## Ellen Foley Spirit Of St. Louis

CLEVELAND INTERNATIONAL/EPIC, 1981

BORN IN Missouri but toughened up in New York's rock and theatre scenes, Ellen Foley was already a familiar voice in 1981. She'd duetted with Meat Loaf on *Paradise By The Dashboard Light* on *Bat Out Of Hell* in 1977; thereafter, Ian Hunter and Mick Ronson produced 1979's solo debut *Nightout*, promoted to UK viewers with a subversive performance of The Rolling Stones' *Stupid Girl*, in the company of musclemen and swimsuit models, on Kenny Everett's TV show. But in February 1980, Foley had a fateful meeting with Mick Jones at London's Venue. Romance bloomed, setting off a chain of events that led to The Clash backing her on, and the Jones/Joe Strummer team writing for, her follow-up *Spirit Of St. Louis*.

"[Mick and I] lived in New York and London to split up the time," recalls Foley today. "It was time for me to make a record, and he wanted to make a record with me, and he brought the band in. They didn't seem to object and it came about sort of naturally."

Recording took place in August 1980 at Wessex Studios, where The Clash were completing their triple-LP *Sandinista!* Foley duetted with Jones on that record's 45 *Hitsville UK*, and recalls a porous approach to recording the two albums.

"It was a pretty long process," she says. "But they were very organised, and it was a nice atmosphere. Mick, Paul and Topper did all the basic tracks and then everyone else [various Blockheads and Strummer's fiddling pal Tymon Dogg] came in. It was very organic and improvisational. Joe wasn't actually involved in the record, but he was around, and we talked. He was very sensitive, and

respectful. I think Joe was probably a feminist. Because I thought he was so brilliant, I'd go along with what he was writing. He created incredible stories for me to tell. I can't see him doing a lot of these songs."

While the guitar-bass-drums bedrock of the record is recognisably The Clash, the six Strummer/Jones originals reveal different aspects of the mothership, channelling an idea of the female anima in songs which recall such tender Clash songs as *Midnight To Stevens*, *Death Is A Star* or *Train In Vain*. With Foley's barnstorming rock voice tempered into a croon, opener *The Shattered Palace* is a lilting Hellenic ballad sung by a courtesan — Clash consigliere Kosmo Vinyl did Greek dancing on the video — while Foley brings her theatrical experience to the fantastical *The Death Of The Psychoanalyst Of Salvador Dali*, where images of Gene Vincent's rusted cufflinks and policemen "begging for soup" emblemise surrealist breakdown. Foley also praises tranquillised housewife vignette *Theatre Of Cruelty*, petroleum rocker *M.P.H.* and execution bolero *In The Killing Hour*, but says, "my favourite song on the album is *Torchlight*. Mick and I were singing together. It's about people who are lovers — much as hate that I word — and it was about a real resilience. It had a great uptempo, positive feel, it's romantic [like] *Train In Vain* was incredibly romantic... he had it in him."

She recalls, affectionately, that Jones was unused to writing for anyone other than Strummer, and requests for a different key were met with "Whaddya mean?!... there were always things between Joe and Mick, the way there

CREDITS

**Tracks:** The Shattered Palace / Torchlight / Beautiful Waste Of Time / The Death Of The Psychoanalyst Of Salvador Dali / M.P.H. / My Legionnaire / Theatre Of Cruelty / How Glad I Am / Phases Of Travel / Game Of A Man / Indestructible / In The Killing Hour

**Personnel:** Ellen Foley (vcls), Mick Jones (vcls, gtr), Joe Strummer, John Turnbull (gtrs), Paul Simonon, Norman Watt-Roy (bs), Topper Headon (drms), Mickey Gallagher (keybds), Davey Payne (sax), Tymon Dogg (violin).

**Producer:** Mick Jones with Bill Price (engineer, mixing), Jeremy Green (assistant engineer)

**Released:** March 1981

**Recorded:** Wessex Studios, north London

**Chart peak:** 57 (UK), 152 (US)

**Current availability:** Lemon/Cherry Red CD (with *Nightout*)

are between any songwriting marriage. A real grounding force on my record, and *Sandinista!*, was Bill Price, the engineer and, really, the producer. He was the calm head."

Of the other six titles, a charged cover of Edith Piaf favourite *My Legionnaire* gives a novel twist to The Clash's combat obsessions, though Foley is less admiring of songs written by Tymon Dogg, noting, "I didn't find him to be a great part of the experience." (Of his *Game Of A Man* she pithily observes, "WTF?")

She admits to other ambivalences about the album, saying, "I'm not sure that I feel powerful within it. I was intimidated. I thought I was mature. I'd done theatre and Broadway and television and the Meat Loaf thing, being powerful for a young girl, and then maybe it fell apart a little bit. Things are very 'madame,' as they say in fashion, when they should be very, 'Fuck You!' I was a bit out of my element."

With a hometown-referencing title, after the monoplane piloted by Charles Lindbergh for the first transatlantic flight, the album was released in March 1981. Peaking at UK Number 57, and a modest hit in the Netherlands, it reached 152, for two weeks, in the US. "We set out to make a modern cabaret record," she says now.

"But it was too weird. If it had been for my fourth album, it would have been great."

Around this time Foley was also filmed alongside The Clash playing "street scum" in Martin Scorsese's *The King Of Comedy*. "We were standing in front of [legendary Times Square store] Colony Records," she laughs. "We spent the day yelling at Robert De Niro. That was fun!" She would also appear on Clash farewell *Combat Rock* in 1982, but split with Jones in the summer of that year. Is The Clash's *Should I Stay Or Should I Go* about her, as legend claims? "I don't know," she says. "Full stop!"

Foley's later credits included Joe Jackson's *Body And Soul*, Jim Steinman's Pandora's Box project and doing the vocal arrangement for Bonnie Tyler's *Holding Out For A Hero*. On-screen, she appeared in *Tootsie*, *Fatal Attraction*, *Married To The Mob* and numerous US TV shows. Now, new LP *Fighting Words* gets back to her rock'n'roll roots: on seize-the-day lead track *I'm Just Happy To Be Here* she duets with Karla

DeVito, who lip-sync'd Foley's powerhouse vocals on the *Paradise By The Dashboard Light* video.

Ultimately, she's at peace with *Spirit Of St. Louis*. "It's such a beautiful sounding record," she says. "Incredible musically, the songs, the instrumentation and the risks that were taken. There's a real maturity to it. You know what? It was a fabulous thing to do, and I really wish people would hear it again."

Ian Harrison

*Fighting Words* is out on August 6 on *Urban Noise*.



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ELLEN FOLEY