SUZANNE VEGA

Biography

Widely regarded as one of the foremost songwriters of her generation, Suzanne Vega emerged as a leading figure of the folk-music revival of the early 1980s when, accompanying herself on acoustic guitar, she sang what has been called contemporary folk or neo-folk songs of her own creation in Greenwich Village clubs. Since the release of her self-titled, critically acclaimed 1985 debut album, she has given sold-out concerts in many of the world's best-known venues. In performances devoid of outward drama that nevertheless convey deep emotion, Vega sings in a distinctive, clear vibrato-less voice that has been described as "a cool, dry sandpaper- brushed near-whisper" and as "plaintive but disarmingly powerful."

Bearing the stamp of a masterful storyteller who "observes the world with a clinically poetic eye," Suzanne’s songs have always tended to focus on city life, ordinary people and real world subjects. Notably succinct and understated, Suzanne Vega’s work is immediately recognizable, as utterly distinct and thoughtful as it was when her voice was first heard on the radio over 30 years ago.

Suzanne was born in Santa Monica, CA, but grew up in Spanish Harlem and the Upper West Side of New York City. She was influenced by her mother, a computer systems analyst and her stepfather, the Puerto Rican writer Egardo Vega Yunque. There was a heady mix of multicultural music playing at home: Motown, bossa nova, jazz and folk. At age 11 she picked up a guitar and as a teenager she started to write songs.

Suzanne studied dance at the High School for the Performing Arts and later attended Barnard College where she majored in English Literature and minored in theater. In 1979 after Suzanne attended a concert by Lou Reed, she began to find her true artistic voice and distinctive vision for contemporary folk. Receptionist by day, Suzanne was hanging out at the Greenwich Village Songwriter’s Exchange by night. Soon she was playing iconic venues like The Bottom Line and Folk City. The word was out and audiences were catching on.

At first, record companies saw little prospect of commercial success. Suzanne’s demo tape was rejected by every major record company—and twice by the very label that eventually signed her. Her self-titled debut album (A&M) was finally released in 1985, co-produced by Steve Addabbo and Lenny Kaye, guitarist for Patti Smith. 1,000,000 records later, it was clear that Suzanne’s voice was resonating around the world. "Marlene on the Wall" was a surprise hit in the U.K and Rolling Stone eventually included the record in their “100 Greatest Recordings of the 1980’s.”

1987’s follow up, *Solitude Standing*, again co-produced by Addabbo and Kaye, elevated her to star status. The album hit #2 in the UK and #11 in the States, was nominated for three Grammys including Record of the Year and went platinum in the US, selling three million copies worldwide. “Luka” is a song that has entered the cultural vernacular; certainly the only hit song ever written from the perspective of an abused boy.

The opening song on *Solitude Standing* was a strange little a cappella piece, “Tom’s Diner” about a non-descript restaurant near Columbia University. Without Suzanne’s permission, it was remixed by U.K. electronic dance duo “DNA” and bootlegged as “Oh Susanne.” Suddenly her voice on this obscure tune was showing up in the most unlikely setting of all: the club. Suzanne permitted an official release of the remix of “Tom’s Diner” under its original title that reached #5 on the Billboard pop chart and went gold. In 1991, she brought the remix and other unsolicited versions of the song together in a compilation called *Tom’s Album*.

Suzanne co-produced the follow-up album with Anton Sanko, 1990’s *Days Of Open Hand*. The album also featured a string arrangement by minimalist composer Philip Glass. Years earlier she had penned lyrics for his song cycle “Songs From Liquid Days.” Continuing to battle preconceptions, she teamed with producer Mitchell Froom for 1992’s *99.9F*. The album’s sound instigated descriptions such as “industrial folk” and “techno folk.” Certified gold, *99.9F* won a New York Music Award as Best Rock Album.

In 1996, Vega returned with the similarly audacious *Nine Objects Of Desire*, also produced by Mitchell Froom, who by then was her husband. “Woman On The Tier (I’ll See You Through)” was released on the Dead Man Walking soundtrack. Over the years, she has also been heard on soundtracks including Pretty In Pink (“Left Of Center” with Joe Jackson) and contributed to such diverse projects as the Disney compilation *Stay Awake*, Grateful Dead tribute *Deadicated*, and the Leonard Cohen tribute *Tower Of Song*. In 1999 The Passionate Eye: The Collected Writings Of Suzanne Vega, a volume of poems, lyrics, essays and journalistic pieces was published by Spike/ Avon Books. In 2001, she returned to her acoustic roots for her first new album in five years, the critics’ favorite, *Songs In Red And Gray.*

In 2007, Suzanne released the Grammy award winning *Beauty & Crime* on Blue Note Records, a deeply personal reflection of her native New York City in the wake of the loss of her brother Tim Vega and the tragedy of 9/11. But the record is not a sad one, per se, as her love for the city shines through as both its subject and its setting. In it, Suzanne mixes the past and present, the public with the private, and familiar sounds with the utterly new, just like the city itself

Suzanne Vega continues to surprise. A pioneer among singer-songwriters, Suzanne has embarked on a project to re-imagine her own songbook in a stripped down and intimate manner, creating 4 new thematic albums called the *Close-Up Series*. Suzanne’s latest album, *Lover, Beloved: Songs from an Evening with Carson McCullers*, is 10 songs co-written with Duncan Sheik, taken from Suzanne’s one woman play about the Southern gothic novelist Carson McCullers, with Ms. Vega playing the lead.

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