



## **the wendy starland interview**

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I first met Wendy Starland a couple of years ago, when we were introduced by a mutual acquaintance, guitarist Oz Noy. In that short time, the amount of progress she's made on the way to stardom is amazing. Recently, I caught her performance at an International Songwriters Hall of Fame event and, a few days later, we're sitting down to discuss what's happening with her seemingly inexhaustible roster of projects.

As we walk along Broadway, on the Upper West Side, a woman stops us, asking Wendy, "Who are you? Are you a movie star?" Wendy laughs it off, but that's definitely what she projects. Deesh Clothing, one of the hippest contemporary lines, thinks so too; not only have they used Starland's music in their ads, they've also used her as a model. Then, there's Hollywood; her song "Stolen Love", a ballad about some dear friends she lost in the tragedy of 9/11, has been signed as the theme song for the upcoming *Living the Lie*, with Cameron Diaz and Jon Bon Jovi. Nomad Films producer David-Michael Petragnani has approached her about being a music supervisor for his upcoming film called *Swipe*, and Daniel Bigel—producer of such pictures as *Two Girls and a Guy*, *Harvard Man*, *Black and White*, and *Empire*—is also after her tunes for a film.

*So, what can she do for an encore?* I ask, as we slide right up against the front window of the coffee shop and into a booth that's splashed with sunshine. It's one of the first really nice days of spring and there's a feeling of carefree release in the air. Thousands of people line the streets. "Did I understand that one of the songs you did at the Hall of Fame show is being released in Europe?"

"Dancing with the Sea." She orders a grapefruit and I go for the turkey burger. "Universal's releasing it as a single on a compilation with songs by Shawn Colvin, Edie Brickell, and Katie Melua."

I noticed in the program guide that that tune was co-written with Jack Livesey. "When you co-write a song, does one write the words and the other the music, or do both of you work on both? How does that work?"

She says that she'll write the lyrics to 99 per cent of her songs but that she likes to write music with Livesey because "he can finish my musical sentences beautifully. Collaboration like that is an incredible process. It's like falling in love—so fresh and unexpected."

Wendy's deep appreciation for the craft of songwriting is something she combines in her tunes with an uncanny production savvy (for example, the way words are whispered under their sung counterparts in "Garden of Temptation"). She speaks a bit about some of her heroes and influences.

**Sting:** "For me, he is the ultimate. He approaches music from an intellectual standpoint. For example, using different time signatures in one song. I love how he combines rock, pop, world and jazz music seamlessly. He's a genius."

**Carole King:** "She's just an incredible songwriter, worthy of so much respect. I'm floored by her songwriting ability. And she proved that she could write great songs not only for herself, like on *Tapestry*, but for so many others, too. She has a real love for the process, not just for the glory."

**Seal:** "I'm really into voice textures and Seal has so many levels. His ethereal kind of music, with such specific melodic lines...there's so much passion and bravery in his music."

**Annie Lennox:** "A white girl with soul! I love her because she embraces the depth in her voice; she's not worried about showing how high she can sing. Her music is so original, it's not straight-ahead anything."

I mention that the songwriting partnership with Livesey must be very satisfying. (Livesey's a principal in Duotone Audio Group in New York, a major hub for composers, producers and songwriters.) The waiter stares a little; I wonder if he's wondering if he saw Wendy singing "Amazing Grace" on "The Apprentice", as millions of other viewers did. (She didn't get to meet Trump.

We talk some about how she likes helping out fellow songwriters and performers, a case in point being Stefani Germanotta, who wowed the crowd at the same Hall of Fame event mentioned earlier. Starland was so impressed with Germanotta that she practically grabbed her by the wrist and dragged her to the phone to speak to Rob Fusari, another composer with whom Wendy collaborates. Fusari's written and produced number one hits with Destiny's Child and Will Smith and is always on the lookout for talented newcomers. "He couldn't be there that night, but he asked to keep an eye out for somebody who had the ability and the desire, and that's definitely Stefani," Starland says.

Perhaps the biggest influence of all, on Starland, has been international superstar Sting, who was so impressed with her that they've had two private meetings to talk about life and music. A Sting colleague, producer Hugh Padgham—arguably one of the three or four most influential producers in music over the last few decades—flew in from London just to hear Starland perform live. One scheduled appointment with Sting became a near disaster when Starland fell and broke her ankle on the way and couldn't make it in time. She was unable to make that up for many months

We run out of time before we can discuss much more, and there's a *lot* more in her career that isn't discussed here. I have to go and Wendy's off to shop for a couple of chandeliers. Before, of course, working all night on composing and recording, once again. This is the kind of dedication that always bears fruit. Starland's road to success, in an incredibly hard field of endeavor (which all began, by the way, when she was in school attending a Maceo Parker concert and he pulled her up out of the audience to come onstage), is certainly a great model for anyone chasing down a dream.

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