

Donna Summer

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Singer/songwriter/pop culture icon Donna Summer has been working hard on CRAYONS, her bold and long-awaited new collection of songs, the artist's first full-length studio album of newly-penned material since 1991's "Mistaken Identity" and her first new release since "VH1 Presents: Live & More Encore!," the CD (and DVD) companion to her top-rated VH1 television special which returned her to the Billboard Top 200 in 1999.

Summer, of course, rocketed to international superstardom in the mid-1970s when her groundbreaking merger of R&B, soul, pop, funk, rock, disco and avant-garde electronica catapulted underground dance music out of the clubs of Europe to the pinnacles of sales and radio charts around the world.

Maintaining an unbroken string of hits throughout the 70s and 80s, most of which she wrote, Donna holds the record for most consecutive double albums to hit #1 on the Billboard charts (3) and first female to have four #1 singles in a 12 month period; 3 as a solo artist and one as a duo with Barbara Streisand.

A five-time Grammy winner, Donna Summer was the first artist to win the Grammy for Best Rock Vocal Performance, Female (1979, "Hot Stuff") as well as the first-ever recipient of the Grammy for Best Dance Recording (1997, "Carry On"). In 2004, she became one of the first inductees, as both an Artist Inductee and a Record Inductee (for 1977's "I Feel Love") into the Dance Music Hall of Fame in New York City. It is estimated that Donna Summer has sold more than 130 million records worldwide.

The arrival of a new Donna Summer album is a major musical event and CRAYONS is a worthy addition to one of the world's most influential musical catalogs. "I wanted this album to have a lot of different directions on it," says Donna. "I did not want it to be any one baby. I just wanted it to be a sampler of flavors and influences from all over the world. There's a touch of this, a little smidgeon of that, a dash of something else ... like when you're cooking."

CRAYONS with all its songs co-written by Donna Summer, is an international banquet of musical delights and surprises. The lead-in track, "Stamp Your Feet," co-written by Summer with Greg Kurstin (Lily Allen, Kylie Minogue, Pink) and Danielle Brisebois (Natasha Bedingfield, New Radicals, Kelly Clarkson), is a powerhouse stadium tub-thumper which, according to Donna, was originally called "The Player's Anthem." "It's the whole concept of being a player in life, coupled with the idea of being a player on an actual field, the whole thing, dealing with the pain and doing things even though you are afraid. Even though you're afraid of something and your knees are knocking, you get up and do it because a lot depends on it. Players get taken off to the sidelines and bandaged and thrown back in the game because it depends on them to win the game. We're all 'players.' It goes back to Shakespeare: 'All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players.'"

Donna especially loves her new song, "Crayons" (also written with Kurstin and Brisebois). "It encompasses a lot of what the album is about," she says. "Every song is a different color. Since I'm also a visual artist, that title ties a lot of the loose ends of my life together. The song wrote itself pretty quickly. Taking it to the next level, we influence

each other in life. You may have an Arab friend or an Israeli friend or an Indian friend and so you go and eat a little Indian food (or have a little pita bread), or something you've never experienced and as we immerse ourselves in each other's cultural experiences, it's like taking a crayon and coloring over the lines and the lines become blurred between what's that and what's the other. You take two colors and create other colors and you add a third color and there's another color too. That's how we are in life and that, to me, is a good indication for this album: feeling free to draw between the lines. Everybody gets crayons at some point in their lives, everybody can relate to the basics. It comes down to that child in us, I think there's a commonality in the concept of 'Crayons.'"

On "The Queen Is Back," Donna Summer reveals her wry and witty self-awareness of her musical legacy and her public persona. "I'm making fun of myself," she admits. "There's irony, it's poking fun at the idea of being called a queen. That's a title that has followed me, followed me, and followed me. We were sitting and writing and that title kept popping up in my mind and I'm thinking, 'Am I supposed to write this? Is this too arrogant to write?' But people call me 'the queen,' so I guess it's ok to refer to myself as what everybody else refers to me as. We started writing the song and thought it was kind of cute and funny."

Donna's co-writers on "The Queen Is Back," and on "Mr. Music," were Jonathan "J.R." Rotem (Sean Kingston, Rihanna, Leona Lewis) and Evan Bogart, co-author of Rihanna's "S.O.S," and the son of Casablanca Records founder, Neil Bogart.

Bogart was the early champion of Donna and her music. He passed away from cancer at the age of 39, after releasing many of Donna's earliest and most influential hit records. "I adored him and would have given up everything for him to be alive," says Donna today, remembering a time backstage long ago "when the nail person didn't show up and Neil got on his knees and did my toenails. In many ways he was my mentor and I didn't get to say goodbye to him." When Donna met Evan Bogart, she was struck by his uncanny resemblance to the label executive. "It's almost like they chiseled him out of his father," Donna observed. "I'm in the studio looking at him and I get tears in my eyes, he has no idea why. I just wanted to hug him because it's like I'm seeing someone I haven't seen since his father passed away. It's almost like Neil is looking at me through him. Evan and I hit it off immediately; there was a synergy that happened really quickly."

That synergy can be heard in "Mr. Music," a song that Donna says "transforms the moment." Driving in Florida one night, Donna threw on the track to help her keep awake on the road. "'Mr. Music,'" she says, "he's like any DJ, the guy on the radio station, the guy in the DJ booth, the guy that's changing your moods, the guy that keeps you going, the guy that's on the radio in the morning when you're driving. He's everything you need him to be. Music fast forwards you from one place to another because it takes you away from where you are in a strange way and elevates your mood. When I play 'Mr. Music,' it's euphoric, it's very happy."

Songs on CRAYONS run the musical gamut from "a really real pop pop song" like "The Science of Love," written by Donna and Toby Gad (Fergie's "Big Girls Don't Cry", Natsha Bedingfield) to retro-modern "dance-oriented" tracks like "I'm A Fire," written by Donna, Sebastian Arocha Morton and 2 time Oscar winner Al Kasha to the "socially conscious" "Bring Down The Reign" and the world-music-flavored "Driving Down Brazil."

With the album's centerpiece ballad, "Be Myself Again," penned by Donna Summer, Wayne Hector (Carrie Underwood, Il Divo, Westlife) and Lester Mendez (Shakira, Santana), the artist creates the album's most intimate and revelatory musical meditation. "What I wanted to do," she says, "is strip down a song. I wanted it to be a cappella. There's always so much hoopla around the voice, I wanted to do a song where there's no hoopla. There's just you and the audience listening to somebody who's just singing to themselves, singing about the intimate parts of what it has taken to do what they do. The thing to do is stay connected to the true self and that's really difficult in show business. That's what the song is about."

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Born Donna Gaines on New Year's Eve to a large family in Boston, she developed an early interest in music. From the age of eight, Summer sang in church choirs and city-wide choruses, and by her early twenties, was performing in musical theatre in Germany, winning parts in such highly-acclaimed shows as "Hair," "Showboat," "Godspell," and "Porgy and Bess" as well as performing with the Viennese Folk Opera. She released her first single, a cover of the Jaynets' girl group classic, "Sally Go Round The Roses," in 1971. While singing backup, she met producers Giorgio Moroder and Pete Bellotte who produced her first single, "Hostage," which became a hit in the Netherlands, France and Belgium.

In 1975, Moroder and Bellotte produced the international hit, "Love to Love You Baby," which rose to #2 on the Billboard Hot 100 and triggered Summer's triumphant return to the United States as a key figure of the then-emerging disco genre. "Love To Love You Baby" paved the way for such international hits as "MacArthur Park," "Bad Girls," "Hot Stuff," "Dim All The Lights," "On The Radio," and "Enough Is Enough," as well as the Grammy and Academy award winning theme song "Last Dance," from the film "Thank God It's Friday," which remains a milestone in Donna's career.

In 1980, Summer became the first artist to sign with David Geffen's new label, Geffen Records, leaving her disco days behind and moving into the next phase of her career. In the years that followed, Summer collaborated with writers and producers such as Quincy Jones, Michael Omartian and England's dance-pop production compound Stock Aitken Waterman and produced a steady stream of hits from "State of Independence," featuring Michael Jackson on backing vocals, to the abiding feminist anthem "She Works Hard For The Money," one of the most-played songs of all-time and the infectious "This Time I Know It's For Real."

In 1994, she released "Endless Summer," a greatest hits retrospective, containing a new song, "Melody of Love," which became Billboard's #1 Dance Record of the Year. She also released the critically acclaimed gem "Christmas Spirit," a collection of Summer's original songs and holiday standards recorded with the Nashville Symphony Orchestra. Summer spent the '90s continuing to tour, performing to sold-out audiences worldwide. In 1997, when the new "Best Dance Recording" Category was created at the Grammy Awards, Donna Summer was the first winner with her fifth career Grammy award for "Carry On."

In 1999, Sony/Epic Records released "VH1 Presents Donna Summer: Live & More – Encore!," an album and DVD of Summer's critically acclaimed VH1 broadcast taped at New York's Hammerstein Ballroom. The show premiered on VH1 as one of the

network's highest rated shows to date and featured live performances of Summer's top hits.

Donna Summer has earned five Grammy Awards, six American Music Awards, three consecutive #1 platinum double albums (she's the only artist, male or female, ever to accomplish this), 11 gold albums, four #1 singles, 2 platinum singles, and 12 gold singles. Donna is also the first female artist to have a #1 single and #1 album on the Billboard charts simultaneously ("Live & More;" "MacArthur Park" 1978) a feat she also repeated six months later ("Bad Girls" & "Hot Stuff" in 1979). She has charted 21 #1 hits on the Billboard Disco/Dance charts, over a period of 25 years a milestone solidifying her as THE Queen of Dance. In addition to her recording and performing career, Summer is an accomplished visual artist whose work has been shown at exhibitions worldwide including Steven Spielberg's "Starbright Foundation Tour of Japan" and The Whitney Museum as well as a prestigious engagement at Sotheby's in New York.

In 2003, Random House published her autobiography "Ordinary Girl," co-authored with Marc Eliot. Also that year, Universal released "The Journey," containing all of her original hits, as well as three new songs.

Two years ago, Donna decided to go back on the road and reconnect with her audience. "I was sitting around the house, like I say on stage, and fast becoming a desperate housewife," she laughs. "I asked myself, 'What am I going to do? What do I like?' I needed to feel like I could connect again with the audience, fully be there, conscious, not with the bells and whistles and a lot of stuff. I wanted to get an honest relationship going. And once I did that, I felt like I could put another record out. It really is difficult after so long to define yourself when people have such a definite past image of you. You need to drop that image somewhat and move on into the future. It's not easy to find a way to bridge the gap between the old and the new and still not lose the audience and make them feel you've deserted them from who you used to be. I've gotten older, I'm a mother, I have grandkids, my life has changed. Looking around, I've been blessed literally to have a world audience. I've traveled all over the world singing in so many different countries and I really wanted to incorporate some sounds and elements, in the words and instrumentation of other places. I wanted the world to recognize that it had also influenced me."

With CRAYONS Donna Summer and the world re-ignite an abiding musical love affair that burns brighter than ever.

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