

An Interview with Lorraine Devon Wilke – October 2005

Written by Michael Sutton

In my nearly 20 years as a professional music journalist, I've had the pleasure of interviewing a vast number of '80s New Wave veterans, everyone from the Railway Children to Terri Nunn of Berlin. But most of those artists, despite how America's fickle nature has transformed popular music numerous times since their heyday, remain closely linked to their roots. Singer/songwriter Lorraine Devon Wilke breaks the mold. Listening to her solo debut, you wouldn't think she had originated from Los Angeles' famed early '80s New Wave scene with a pop/rock group called Devon. In another world Devon found the success that their similar peers Scandal ("The Warrior") did. However, in this reality that was not the case. But do not feel sorry for them, at least Wilke for she has among the year's finest accomplishments in Triple A rock with *Somewhere On the Way*. Here she speaks of the past and the present and the missing links between them.

Michael Sutton: What happened to your '80s band Devon?

Lorraine Devon Wilke: MTV exhaustion; it was challenging to stay competitive and cutting edge when the demand for new and innovative ways to layer belts and use hair product was never-ending. But seriously, it was more a case of creative obsolescence...a sense that by the late 80's that particular incarnation was played out. I was lucky to have had most of my original line-up for the bulk of the time we were together: Tony Alexander on drums, Jeff Brown on bass, Glen Rueger on keys, and David Resnik on guitar; later Tim Bonhomme took over on keys and Pat McDermott on guitar, and there were a few other players along the way, but that was the core group. We were fortunate to have had financial backers with deep pockets and very hands-on management the whole way, and we quite enthusiastically ran the gamut of experiences that were there to be had: the very go-go '80s club scene in L.A., record company mating dances, showcases, recording in great, classic analogue studios, being mentored and produced by some true rock greats, touted as the Next Big Thing...it was an amazing and very heady time. But when we didn't crack the code to getting that elusive major label record deal (and the indie movement was only in its nascent stages at the time), I think we suffered a case of rock & roll demoralization, so to speak. Devon as a band stopped playing clubs long before the project itself expired. We continued on with recordings and showcases but by '87, still bereft of the grail of a recording contract, the towel was finally thrown and everyone moved on to other projects, including me.

MS: The musical evolution between Devon and your solo album is an artistic leap that spans years and influences. Describe you how you went from Point A - the New Wave-styled pop of Devon - to Point B - the bluesy adult rock of Lorraine Devon Wilke?

LDW: I lived many more years and had some shit kicked out of me along the way...if that doesn't lead you to bluesy adult rock, what does? In all honesty, so much of it had to do with the particular players I was working with. My original influences ran from folk to roots-rock to R&B, with soul music, and its bluesy feel and deep emotions, my personal favorite. In fact, I was in a cover band doing a lot of R&B in the early '80s when I met Tony Alexander and, with him and David Resnik, we put Devon together. They had just come from a New Wave project called Reeves Nevo & the Cinch – very influenced by the Police, Elvis Costello, etc. – and their predilection for that type of sound and rhythm was a big part of the direction we took. I hadn't done a lot of songwriting at that point so this was my initiation into that arena, and with our combined influences, the music became a sort of New Wave/soul hybrid. Live, it had a very edgy, soulful feel, but much of what we recorded sounds more straightforward rock; our backers and management were convinced a more mainstream New Wave approach was the way to go - looking back, who knows? I always loved the music we did, but it was only one part of my musical soul. After time and life led me down some very diverse paths and experiences, my musical evolution took a decidedly more spiritual turn – not religious in any way, but

more heart and soul, more about the telling of personal and observational stories that moved me and touched on universal themes and emotions. You can't live decades of life with your eyes wide open and not come away with a deepened perspective. And when I met Rick Hirsch, the extraordinary guitarist with whom I wrote and produced this record, our personal styles and mutual artistic sensibilities just naturally led to the eclectic, but always soulful, music incorporated in this record...almost, in a way, full circle from my beginning.

MS: Critics have brought up the heartaches in your album; what elements of your songs do you feel they are largely missing out on?

LDW: It's not so much that they're "missing out" on anything; it's more that the emphasis is too limited. Yes, there's heartache, maybe even a fair amount of it, but there's also healing, redemption, joy, love, acceptance, even humor, and all those other emotions on the other end of the spectrum. I wouldn't want someone to read a review that underlines the "heartache" of the record and not realize there's more to it than that. Listen, I remember what teen angst feels like. The distractedness, ambition, and searching of your 20's and 30's feels like yesterday to me. I know that there is anger, rage, heartache, sorrow and bitterness out there to endure...and plenty of artists to chronicle it all. But at this point for me, there's the recognition that life is a sweet, poignant, and painful act of balance and I've written an album that embodies heartache *and* hope; it's important to me that the arch of that whole spectrum is heard and understood.

MS: Are your lyrics autobiographical or are they based on the experiences of people you know?

LDW: Both. But probably less autobiographical than you'd think...observation and sheer imagination have played their part in terms of inspiration. While there's not an emotion on this record I haven't personally felt or experienced in some measure, several of the "stories" are not mine. You'll have to ask more explicit questions to find out which ones.

MS: What are your plans for the future? Do you plan on experimenting with other genres of music?

LDW: I'm in the process of putting a new band together to get out and support this CD, and along with that, get working on some new material. It's a challenge in this very competitive and underappreciated indie market to keep things moving forward, but there's also a tremendous freedom in it. It's all about what you have to say as an artist and how you want to say it...the rest of it either comes or it doesn't so you better love what you're doing and be certain it's your authentic voice. After years of chasing the dream, you ultimately realize the only thing you can control is your own creativity...and I'm quite greedy about making sure I'm only doing what I love in music these days. As for experimenting with other genres of music, I don't know. I know what I love – and it covers a lot of ground – but I wouldn't mind experimenting with more acoustic music, other world rhythms and feels, maybe more rootsy instrumentations, or just straightforward classic blues or R&B. I think that should take me about four or five more albums to cover. But who knows? Right now I'm singing and writing the kind of music on *Somewhere On the Way*; maybe later I'll be fronting a funk band or sitting with a guitar player in some dusty French pub singing Cesaria Evora songs. It's all a journey, isn't it?

<http://www.lorrainedevonwilke.com>