

"American Girl"

Interview with Roxanne Fontana

By Helen Marketti

Originally from Brooklyn, New York, Roxanne Fontana followed her dreams of being a rock star, songwriter, artist, designer and poet. She travels a path of rock and roll reckless despair yet bounces back time and again. She earned every one of her musical scars to be where she is now. She found herself in the company of her idols (Tom Petty, Anita Pallenberg, and more), performed in THE hottest clubs of the times then realized all that seemed a sure thing collapsed around her. It was never the environment where good ole fashioned morals and values would prevail. Its rock and roll where being stepped on and over was the norm rather than an exception. There are many twists, turns and stops as her journey begins during the 60s and it ends in the late 90s. It's a story that delves into a rock n roll life where we wish we were there at certain moments and glad we weren't there for others, yet Roxanne Fontana has found her way and timing IS everything. She took everything dished out to her and emerged stronger than ever.

Roxanne, you spent endless hours exploring places on your own, even from an early age. Do you think that kind of "hunger" is still there for exploring around us or are we more passive these days as people?

People are mostly passive and "safe" no matter what era it is. I see you are probably referring to the 60s. I think in the 60s, people broke out of convention and then they went back to it but I think we're all going to break out again. I can feel that beginning. In the 60s, people threw away the idea of being "safe" and being capitalists first and foremost.

Next time it happens it may be because we're forced to, where there is no money to be made any more. We were breaking out because the system got so corrupt and we became a feudal society. This has happened so much in history, the Kings trying to control the serfs and we always win! That kind of breaking out will be more revolutionary than the 60s. It's already happening in so many parts of the world. America has been kept in this terrible propaganda prison, created by the media and they really believe it all. Both the Democrats and the Republicans, it's terrible. The awakening is going to be very rude.

You started The International Brian Jones Memorial Fan Club after he passed away. What was it about Brian Jones (Rolling Stones) that drew you in?

I started the fan club in 1974; it was about feeling as if I might be old enough to get into the music business...at 14, hah! So I knew that running a fan club was a good way to do it. I just had the idea to do a fan club for Brian Jones and how easy that would be since the Stones never spoke about him AT ALL in that era so it was free territory. I thought it was weird but I knew Buddy Holly had a fan club and he was dead. I had no idea of the minefield I was walking into, how taboo it was and why; the murder and all of that. No idea at all! It was great though because it was all very punk rock and as I write in the book, the punk scene completely embraced my fan club. The fanzine was just poetry and drawings. The members would send me their poems and drawings about Brian and I would staple them together. The first two fanzines were just stapled and Xeroxes, pictures of Brian from 16 Magazine and things like that. When Mick Jagger got a whiff of it about four years later, I had heard that he liked it a lot, which was great. It's been so close to me my whole life, Brian Jones, that it's hard to say how it all

happened. He's just a ghost that likes me, I guess. The fan club lasted for about five years by me and then it was passed around to two other people. It did finally stop but now it's around again. The fan club is just a super cool website that I designed and its the best one on the net for Brian Jones. (www.brianjonesmemorialfanclub.com) I'm an artist, give me an assignment/project, I'm loving it.

Throughout the book, you had a series of very interesting jobs; was there any one job that you drew the most from as far as life experience, knowledge of music and the industry? Do you wish you had worked longer for Connie Stevens?

I never had a music business job except for the musician's union secretary job and when I did Paul McCartney work at Rogers & Cowan. My favorite "job" was selling marijuana. I loved being a secretary even though I would be sent home for wearing see-through blouses and looking like a rocker. I loved it. I told myself constantly that this was an acting job because I wanted to go into acting, too. I would just say that I'm an actress playing a secretary and I was able to do it. I was such a great secretary, one of the best in New York City I was told. I worked in the corporate world. I was a statistical typist. I watch Mad Men these days and I miss that world in a weird way. That came into play years later and now I have to do a lot of bureaucratic

work in regards to my daughter who is disabled but my book ends in '99, before the baby. I went back to work for Connie Stevens again in 1999 and that's all I'm going to say about that. So I did go back to work for her 12 years later. I loved her so, as I write in the book.

How did you decide upon the book title out of countless songs you could have chosen? Do you have any regrets from earlier days of your encounter with Tom Petty?

Once I thought to use the title from the song, nothing else had a contest because I had my mind made up. When I had met him, I had only written a few songs. I really wasn't convinced I was even going to go into music at that point, so there wasn't any struggle yet. He just told me to believe in myself but I think it meant more than that. You had to LOVE YOURSELF and be completely vain, which I am, so it was easy advice.

As for regrets in regards to Tom Petty way back then? Yes, I regret what I didn't do but I guess that's the way it goes. I didn't really try to get him, the way another woman might have. I have never been money motivated, even though I would love to have some; it's not a top priority.

You made a very interesting point when you said in your book that sometimes a terrible act would fill a club because the band had many friends - not fans.

Helen, many things that I think are instinctual but I do analyze a lot. Yes, there is a major difference in those two things. When we're speaking on the club level, it's ridiculous and it's so difficult. The music business has been difficult every frigging step of the way. It starts from the beginning when you're in clubs, to being ripped off if you're lucky enough to ever make any money. It's a horrible business and you just have to hope that you love the performance, the actual art, because if you don't then you shouldn't be doing it and there's a lot of that, too.

What do you think your music style is? Who influences you?

The first album is electronic and I love it. I would love to do another like that or more. I love Amanda Lear's disco records of the past few decades. I would love to be the new Amanda Lear on the continent, take her place. She is so huge in Italy and France for so long now and she is over 70, still at it, and still looks incredible. You look at other women



Roxanne, photo credit: John Panzeretta, 1988

her age or even younger, she kicks everybody's ass, and those disco records are fun. My second CD is orchestral pop music, melodic songs, very 1966 my fave kind of music ever. I would love to make a country rock album because I have tons of those songs, too. I would love to do an album of covers, I dream of it. Marianne said I should do a cover of a Tim Hardin song, one that she did back in the day. Isn't that great? I love her.

What other current projects are you working on?

I am also designing clothes and a jewelry line. I feel very much at peace doing that. It's motivating.

I'm more patient with that than I am in a recording studio. I am shocked at this. I'm also planning to maybe do two more videos to songs already recorded, maybe "Michael in the Garden" and "Maybe Lamour Est Bleu". We'll see how that goes. Last year I had the vague plan to try to do four videos in the south of France and if any of them came out OK, I would post them. I was shocked that I loved all four, then I did "Green in England" which I also love. Mat and I have done all the videos. He and I are so involved with things but not just musically. He is my pattern and fabric cutter for the clothing and he does the over lock stitching. We work very well together. I yell and curse then we laugh.

How can fans access your music? Where is it available?

Either directly from me at, www.vivafontana1959.com or cdbaby.com or any of the download houses. If someone wants to stick to his itunes account, everything is on there. If you want "Green", make sure you get the remastered 2011 version. Its better sound quality if you get the recently remastered versions.

Where can fans get a copy of your book?

Amazon.com, Barnes and Noble nook, Sony Reader, all of them. It's only an ebook for now, print copy may be happening soon.

Is there anything else you would like to mention or discuss?

The book is not a retrospective for the most part. I went into the time period as I wrote it. So, if someone picks up the book and is immediately annoyed at the girl in the first chapter, so am I. It has to be read as your going through the journey with her. That's how I wrote it, I didn't think of myself as "I" but as "her". The punk rock parts are all in my 16 - 17 year old head and voice. The later part of the book, the last chapter is closer to what and who Roxanne Fontana became.

*For more information on Roxanne Fontana and her book, "American Girl", please visit, www.vivafontana1959.com Roxanne Fontana is on Facebook.



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