

'PATTI' FROM PAGE 14
career?

"I think it's a combination of things that have made me more visible. *Beverly Hills Cop* did a lot for me [Labelle's theme tune 'New Attitude' was a hit], and Live Aid certainly did. To be seen around the world, for a lot of people who hadn't really heard of me, for them it was like 'Where has this lady been all my life?'."

It's taken a while for your album *Winner in You* to come out since Live Aid though. What took the time?

"Well, it took me a long time to record it, because I was trying to get good material and taking my time and not rushing."

There are many different producers on the album, ranging from Burt Bacharach and Carole Bayer Sager (who wrote the single 'On My Own' with Neil Diamond), Richard Perry, Howard Rice and Ashford and Simpson.

Why did you work with so many producers?

"Well, it wasn't planned, it just happened that way. Everytime I would turn around, one of the producers would come up with something wonderful for me, and I would say, 'Of course, I have to do this. Would you produce it for me?' And they'd say, yes of course — and that's how it happened with all those producers. I didn't plan to do it with that many, but it sure did end up that way."

With your powerful voice, did they have to sit on your voice in the mixing?

"Yes they do. They sit on me all the time! They tell me to stand 10 feet back from the microphone or whatever — anything to condense it."

One person who has been constantly involved with your music is Bud Ellison, your musical director...

"He's been with me 13 years as musical director, and he's been involved with everything I've recorded with Labelle, and with myself. He's like behind-the-producer — he gives them a lot of input. And a lot of times he's not given the credit he should get, but he's like the other



Seventies glitter queens Labelle (L-R): Nona Hendryx, Sara Dash, Patti Labelle.

side of Patti Labelle. All the music that I've been doing for 13 years, he's been the reason that I've been doing most of it."

With the single 'On My Own', why did you choose to sing with Michael McDonald (ex-Doobie Brothers)?

Well, after I had finished recording it I wasn't pleased with it, and I wanted to do it with a male. I'd always wanted to sing with Michael McDonald and so Burt Bacharach called him, and he said yes, he'd love to do it. So he recorded his part after I'd done mine. We met about two or three months after we had

recorded the song. I've always loved his voice and wanted to record with him, and my dream came true."

It didn't seem strange doing it separately?

I did it about a month before he did his part, and after listening to him, it sounded as if we did it together in the same studio, so it didn't matter at all."

Patti Blue Belle

Patti Labelle's earliest significant group was Patti Labelle and the Blue Belles, a girl group which also featured Nona Hendryx, Sarah Dash

and Cindy Birdsong (who later replaced Florence Ballard in the Supremes). During the 60s they toured America as part of soul revues, often on the same bill as Sam Cooke, James Brown, or the Stax and Motown artists.

Was it daunting as a young girl to work with such figures?

"It was wonderful. I was amazed when we got to the theatre to see who was on the show... I would look at the marquee to see who we'd be performing with, and it would impress me very much that we would be with Otis Redding, Joe Tex and all those wonderful legends. I was just like a kid, I guess. I looked at them all with awe."

Last year, Labelle returned to the renovated Apollo Theatre, the legendary venue in Harlem, New York, for a television special *Motown Returns to the Apollo* (which, along with the *Motown 25 Years* special, would be perfect for *12 O'Clock Rock*...).

The Apollo is now a legend to soul lovers — did it have the same aura to you in its heyday?

"Well, you know, when we did that *Motown Returns to the Apollo* it felt really special, very much like it did when we used to perform there. I got chills and I cried, it made me think about when we were there before, and it felt the same to me, except it was painted — it was *nooer* but it still felt the same."

La Belle Trio

In 1971, following the advice of their manager, ex-*Ready Steady Go* producer Vicki Wickham, the Blue Belles became Labelle, changed their look and toughened up their music. With their space-age glittery costumes and bikinis, they predated Kiss:

"We decided that we had to change our image and our sound, and just become three outrageous ladies. Because as the Blue Belles, we were looking very much like the Supremes and the Vandellas and the Marvelettes, and we were all looking and sounding alike. So we went to London and regrouped and stayed there for three months and changed our attitude and our way

of singing and dressing. We came back to America and we were *Labelle*."

You're all quite strong, but very different singers. Did this cause problems in Labelle?

"No — when we were all singing together we all loved what we did and we all agreed to everything. We were all in agreement as far as the music we were doing, but after a while we realised that we couldn't sing the same thing anymore, that we had to go our separate ways. So we left as friends and we're still friends. We talk to each other all the time — we didn't leave as enemies."

Labelle's biggest hit was 'Lady Marmalade', a song about a friend of Dusty Springfield's (who happened to be a prostitute) with the unforgettable hookline 'Gitchee gitchee ya-ya-ya'. Where did you find it?

"Oh we were on our way to New Orleans to record, and we went to Bob Crewe's house the night before, and he played this song for us. When I heard it, I knew it was a hit, and he gave it to us. We took it to New Orleans where we were recording with Allen Toussaint."

The song off your new album 'Sleep With Me Tonight' is very reminiscent of 'Lady Marmalade's catchphrase, 'Voulez vous coucher avec moi ce soir'."

"Oh yes... (laughs) No, it's not a sequel. Though that did strike me, and you know, I love that song, but I wondered if people will think funny or strangely of me saying that line..."

Back then?

"Oh, then and now (laughs). But, (wistfully) there are certain things you have to say in life..."

Patricia

How important is your attitude in survival?

"You have to really believe in yourself, and not let anyone tell you that you can't make it or you can't do this or that. You have to believe that you can do almost anything, and just go out and show the world that you can."

What are your goals now?

"Oh, to become a household word! (Laughs) I've just sold so many platinum albums that I just can't sell any more! I mean, just to make so much music and so much happiness for people — that's what I want to do."

You want to succeed, although it's said you don't want any part of the trappings of show business.

"I'm not crazy about the show biz, what people call show biz. The parties and the drugs and the fun things — they've just never been fun to me. I find a lot of peace and happiness after a show just to go to the hotelroom suite to cook and watch TV, go to sleep and do the next show. I'm not really what you'd call a show biz type."

Nevertheless, a Patti Labelle show is a *show*. According to Patti, plans are in motion to come here in October or November. She says *she* can't wait...

Chris Bourke

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