

CONVERSATION

# Don't make her over

Dionne Warwick talks to *Prime Time* about her long career, life in Brazil and fashion gurus

BY ELIO IANNACCI

what was going on in the world. I was always drawn to anything that was sophisticated. Looking out into the audience would give me maturity. People from all walks of life go to music for guidance—this song did that for many women.

**Once the '70s came, you dove into funk-laden songs such as "Heartbreaker" and "Déjà Vu." Did it feel liberating to be in the midst of the funk and disco generation?**

It did. I was young and that music was for young people, so I dug it. Sometimes I would be at a club or disco and they would be playing a song of mine and I'd be so embarrassed. Most times, I felt it was an honour to hear the disc jockeys play my songs.

**What's your take on women who feel the need to seek out plastic surgeons because they feel they need to look younger for the sake of their careers?**

They don't need to do any of that. They want to do that to themselves. I don't agree with Botox or plastic surgery; I agree with what God gave me. Nobody needs to have procedures like that to stay in the music business—that makes no sense whatsoever. You can't let the pressure get to you.

**How does Brazil compare to living in the United States?**

I don't need Botox because Brazil keeps me feeling younger. Brazil is filled with youthful people who are constantly smiling. The people there put a priority on what I love. They praise music and God passionately. That's why I live there.

**You recently received an honorary doctor of arts from Lincoln College [in Lincoln, Ill.]. Is it important for musicians to be seen as [as] important as academics?**

Definitely. All artists need to be recognized these days. I've learned so much from the people that came before me, so I just hope students can learn something from my story. That's why I decided to write a book. I wanted to make sure I addressed a lot of untrue things that have been said about me in the past. I can't talk about them, so you'll have to buy the book.

**You've always made sure that your self-image was polished as well. Who helped shape your tastes?**

It was Marlene Dietrich who first introduced me to couture. She said it was like a singer's best weapon. Being educated on the ways of Givenchy and Yves Saint Laurent gave me a new insight into the art of presentation. I befriended a lot of these young couture designers and made sure they understood my own style. It's sad that this process isn't happening today. I was part of the golden age of fashion.

**What are your thoughts on the women in pop music today who dress provocatively?**

It does frustrate me. I think the women who are dressing in nearly nothing are selling themselves too short. Talent is talent and that should be dressed up, not dressed down.

**What advice can you give women who see your occupation as a dream job?**

I don't give advice anymore. I stopped doing it long ago. All I can give is encouragement and hope that is enough.

**How often do you practice singing?**

Never. I don't have a vocal coach and I don't practice at all; I don't need them. I have God-given talents—that's enough.

**Aside from your touring and your autobiography, *My Life, As I See It*, what new music can we expect to hear from you?**

I've recorded an album of songs by [song-writer] Sammy Cahn that will be released very soon. He is the man who I respect so much and has written some of Broadway's best songs, so stay tuned.

Solid gold: Dionne Warwick will appear at Casino Rama in October.

GETTY WIREIMAGE

There are so many defining sounds associated with the name Dionne Warwick. For '80s aficionados it's the soft harmonica of her hit "That's What Friends Are For." For Burt Bacharach diehards it's the piano tinkling in "I Say a Little Prayer." For disco lovers Warwick brings to mind the bass associated with TV's *Solid Gold*—the program she hosted in 1979. For cult-movie fanatics it's the dramatic violins off her "(Theme from) Valley of the Dolls," and for infomercial junkies, it's the chatter of those bizarre *Psychic Friends* spots in which Warwick appeared in the early '90s.

But regardless of how you know the 69-year-old singer, her CV is what truly speaks volumes. Awarded five Grammys, one NAACP Image Award and one Billboard trophy, the New Jersey native boasts a 40-years-plus career that ranks her within the same legendary league as Aretha Franklin, Patti LaBelle and Chaka Khan. In contrast to her contemporaries, Warwick's chief strength in soul music was—and still is—her control on the mic. Listening to her shape and bend notes onstage during her challenging-to-sing hit list (which Warwick will be bringing to Casino Rama on October 1 and 2) is remarkable, to say the least. Neither a wailer nor a belter, Warwick approaches her repertoire with masterful poise, mixing classic vocal arrangements with a touch of her recently acquired South American musical influences (Warwick has been living in Brazil for more than a decade). Delivering the same polish in person as she does in the spotlight, she reflects the same sort of class Doris Day, Lena Horne and Julie Andrews are known for. More finishing school than old school, Warwick chats with *Prime Time* about her acclaimed journey in popland.

**Prime Time: Looking back at classic songs such as "Do You Know the Way to San Jose?" and "I Say a Little Prayer," how would you say your approach differed from other singers of the time?**

**Dionne Warwick:** Well, good music does mirror the times you live in, which is why I was singing about love and my life. I also never acted a song out; I always sang from my mind and my heart and took from what I was feeling.

**Your song "Don't Make Me Over" was such a strong statement to make for a woman singer in 1962. The track predated feminism in many ways. How were you able to handle something so adult at the mere age of 22?**

I was young, but I was also alert. I knew