



Proud to be a diva: Bush, 52, is as notorious for making her fan base wait for new material as she is for not talking to the media

A Stradivarius voice sings James Joyce

Few pop stars are as cerebral about making music as the incomparable Kate Bush

KATE BUSH WISHES people would stop “prattling on” about divas. “I don’t understand why so many are against a ‘diva,’” the 52-year-old singer says via phone from her island estate, located in the thick of the Thames River near Reading, just west of London. “I think it equals mastery. If a woman is given this title, you know there is some serious work going down in her life.”

It’s apropos that Bush would be an advocate for the classic, operatic sense of the d-word, as few pop stars today are as cerebral about making music as she is. The English singer-songwriter is as notorious for making her fan base wait for new material (she’s released only one album of original material in 17 years) as she is for *not* talking to the media. To further put things into perspective, her latest disc, *Director’s Cut*—which reworks songs from past albums *The Sensual World* and *The Red Shoes*—is an encyclopedia of literary and cinematic references. In fact, the most intriguing cut on the just-released *Director’s Cut*—a song called *Flower of the Mountain*—has great history. Taking nearly 25 years to record the song “properly” (a past version was used as the title track to 1989’s *The Sensual World*), Bush has completely rewritten the track’s verses and choruses for the new CD.

“My original idea for the lyrics to *Flower of the Mountain* was to use text from James Joyce’s *Ulysses* and have it be the base of the song,” says Bush. “In the late ’80s, I approached the Joyce estate for permission to use the book and I was refused. When it came to

starting up *Director’s Cut*, I thought I just had to go and ask again. I was enormously surprised that they said yes! The original is okay, but releasing it [in 1989] always felt like a bit of a compromise to me, really.”

While most song crafters of Bush’s ilk claim relationships are what drives their writing, she maintains that her verses rarely speak to her personal life. However, they do reflect what movies she’s become obsessed with or which books she’s stocked in her library. “I can’t think of a song of mine that isn’t a character, they are *all* written in character,” Bush says of her the 200-plus recordings. It’s a strategy that has clearly worked for her. Beginning with her first No. 1 hit in the U.K.—1978’s *Wuthering Heights*, which was concocted with passages of dialogue from Emily Brontë’s legendary protagonist, Catherine Earnshaw—Bush’s hits have drawn from works as varied as *Night of the Demon* (a ’50s horror flick that inspired *Hounds Of Love*) and the Old Testament (*The Song of Solomon*).

The cast she’s revisited for *Director’s Cut*—which industry pundits are forecasting will knock out Adele’s current U.K. chart reign—includes a song called *Lily*, which is based on one of her real-life heroines, the late Lily Cornford, a noted spiritual healer in London with whom Bush became close friends in the ’90s. “She was one of those very rare people

who are intelligent, intuitive and kind,” she says of Cornford, who believed in mental colour healing—a process whereby patients would be restored to health by seeing various hues. “I was really moved by Lily and impressed with her strength and knowledge, so it led to a song—which she thought was hilarious.”

Another track veering off the beaten path for Bush is the first single on the album, *Deeper Understanding*. Although it was written in the late ’80s, the re-recording speaks to today’s tech-obsessed generation. Which is why Bush asked her 12-year-old son Bertie to sing on the track with her as the voice of a computer. “I thought it would be more poignant to have the voice of a child coming

from a computer singing about this great empathy and compassion.”

Aside from the litany of cultural, social and real-life references in her catalogue, Bush’s throat is what impresses her contemporaries most. On the

phone from Paris, famous fan Marianne Faithfull notes that Bush’s four-octave range should be regarded as a “national treasure.” “My favorite instrument in the whole world is the human female voice, and Kate Bush is one of the reasons why. It is, by far, a Stradivarius,” Faithfull says. “Which is why she rarely deals with the press or isn’t in a rush to record. She’s one of the few who *can* be above all that.” **ELIO IANNACCI**

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