



VERSATILE REALITY

EX-ROTTINGDEAN GIRL ZOË LEWIS CAN PLAY ANYTHING: PIANO, GUITAR, EVEN THE SPOONS! BY ERIC PAGE

Zoë Lewis is a musician and songwriter with several strings to her bow. The multi-instrumentalist plays Latin jazz, jive, folk and funk, has performed with a host of great musicians and has toured with Judy Collins and Nanci Griffith. Originally from Brighton, Zoë now lives in Provincetown on Cape Cod, Massachusetts, and has travelled the world performing at everything from cruise ships to music festivals to Pride marches. Her upbeat, funny lyrics poke fun at society and praise life's little delights and soon she's coming home to promote her fifth album.

Country girl or international performer: which are you?

I'm a bit in between. I've lived in the States for 20 years. I need a city fix, but I need a walk, like a dog. I'd go prawning and now I go clamming on Cape Cod. Coming from Rottingdean, I have to be by the sea and Provincetown is like that but gay.

What's it like on a lesbian cruise?

I love them, especially the midnight buffet. It can be a real political experience, arriving in a small port with 2,000 lesbians disembarking arm in arm. People look twice, then smile. In Lesbos all the Sappho T-shirts sold out within half an hour.

What made you move to Provincetown?

Wanderlust. I hit the road, really, to come out. It was fate; I went there to busk and ended up getting gigs all summer. I felt like I'd come home.

Who inspired you to sing?

My tone-deaf mother always wanted a child who could sing. Music always paid my way. It took me a long time to find jazz, but when I did Ella Fitzgerald affected me very much.

A lot of your lyrics are political and funny at the same time. Why?

I have to have a message. Standing up in front of people, it's a way to make a change in life. I don't hit people over the head, I like to get on with it and get my point across.

What have you been singing today?

That Daring Young Man On The Flying Trapeze. It was one of my mother's favourites and in the end his wife runs away with another lady!

You can't be that sweet in real life Zoë. What makes you swear?

[Laughing] George Bush and bigots in general.

Do you suffer for your art?

[Laughs] No, my art fills me up totally and I feel entirely lucky to be able to sing and play. I'm not a writer who writes when they suffer, I was brought up an eternal optimist.

Love or lust: which gives the best lyrics?

Well, in lust you write a lot but after a few lustful experiences all your songs come out the same, but love songs [blushes], I suppose combined they make the best songs for me.

You are impossibly English. How do you keep it up?

I had a huge crush on Julie Andrews when she was running around with a guitar, singing and making curtains. Sometimes the sweetest women are the sexiest underneath. Perhaps having older parents allowed me to embrace the old-fashioned. I left England and it's changed, but I've clung on to the world I remember.

How many instruments can you actually play?

Hmmm, about 20 but not all well [laughs]. Travelling taught me that you can make music out of tin cans, spoons – just anything.

Do you have a hero?

[Huge smile, laughs] Julie Andrews.

You give off a very practical can-do vibe. Is that you?

I preferred throwing balls to being domestic. My father taught me how to fix little things. I've made clam pies, but I was a tomboy. I'd rather go fishing than stay in. I still have my Brownie Hostess badge though.

Growing up, did you run away to Brighton to be naughty?

No, I'd go down to the furthest rock at low tide, stand there and look out and think one day I'm going to cross that ocean and be naughty. I had a very happy childhood so didn't need to rebel, but I did dream about leaving and finding myself.

What are you up to right now?

Promoting my fifth album, *A Cure For The Hiccups*, touring the USA and planning to tour Australia. I've been selling loads of albums in Japan so I may tour there. I'd like to write a musical from scratch, too! I'm due for another outburst; I brew for a while then boil over creatively. I'm proud of all the songs. My last album, *Small Is Tremendous*, is out there now – it's got a life of its own.

In the movie of your life, who plays you?

Sean Connery. I've always rather fancied myself as James Bond.

Who was the first girl you kissed?

Julie Andrews, in my dreams, dressed as Sister Maria.

You look half your age – what's your secret Zoë?

You're Never Too Old To Be Young. I don't take life too seriously and why worry? It's pointless.

In what ways does the place where you live affect your music?

I love small communities. There's so much material, all the wild characters and personal stories of people. These kind are the most powerful stories to tell.

Name a musician who you flat-out LOVE.

Nellie McKay, who's a cross between Joyce Grenfell and Doris Day. She's wonderful.

What's the saddest song you've ever heard?

I'm having a hard time with that. Leonard Cohen's *Hallelujah*. I've cried to it, the lyrics and the chord progressions totally slay me. There's something chemical about the melody; it rolls you around and it has the power to stop you in your tracks.

What's the best advice anyone ever gave you?

A Spoonful Of Sugar Makes The Medicine Go Down.



Zoë's fifth all-new album, *A Cure For The Hiccups*, is available now. Catch Zoe live on Wednesday **February 11 at the Latest Music Bar**, Manchester Street Brighton, £8. **01273 687171** www.zoelewis.com