

PATTI RUSSO

Landing the gig of Meat Loaf's duet partner to tour the multi-million selling 'Bat Out Of Hell II', Patti Russo found herself performing in front of thousands of people on a nightly basis. Staying with Meat Loaf for twenty years, Patti has been a key feature of his tours and records up until leaving the band after the release of 'Bat Out Of Hell III'. She also performed in theatre, notably as Esmeralda in 'Notre Dame De Paris' before being cast as Killer Queen in the Las Vegas version of the smash hit Queen musical 'We Will Rock You'. She returned to Meat Loaf for the 'Guilty Pleasure' tour and is now ready to hit the road as a solo artist for the very first time. James Gaden met up with Patti to discuss her remarkable career to date.

Patti has a lot of loyal fans who have been dying to see her strike out on her own, and finally, that time has come.

"Y'know, when I left the band in 2006, I was hooked up with a writer in Nashville," Patti explains, "so most of the stuff I'll be doing was written back then. The timing is perfect for me, I'm excited. Everything is coming together - almost too fast now! We're just printing CDs as we speak; I'm getting some EP's made. It's all 90 miles an hour, the ink probably won't be dry on anything!" she laughs.

The band Patti has assembled for her shows looks great on paper, notable for containing two members of the extended Queen family, Spike Edney and Jamie Moses.

"It was funny, I do gigs with Spike when he does his SAS Band shows. I've been appearing with them since about 2000 and we just became fast friends. Any chance I get to gig with them, I do. This past Christmas, when I came over, Spike told me he would be going off to tour with Queen + Adam Lambert in the States. I thought 'This is perfect!' It meant I could come over here, to a country I love, and play some shows before that. It was like the stars have aligned."

With an EP and a tour to look forward to, a natural progression would be a full blown album.

"Well, it's an EP for now," Patti grins. "Four songs. Fans put them out years ago on Youtube and when I checked them out, the numbers are pretty decent on them. There was one song, from when I came back to Meat Loaf in 2008, called 'Bring Me A Bible And A Beer' which I had written. I performed that on Meat's tour, it was put in the show last minute. I'd never actually recorded a studio version of the song, so I've finally finished that and that will be on the EP. Hopefully we'll have it ready to sell at the first gig in Southampton. Meat Loaf fans will know all the songs, they'll have heard them already on the internet, but like I said, 'Bible...' was never recorded so it's nice to have that. There are songs I'll be doing in the show which I had no time to record, along with new music I'm currently writing. I want those to line up so I can put together a full length record. There has been a lot of inspiration, I have to say!"

The tour will coincide with Patti reaching a milestone 50th birthday this year.

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With Patti being a great live performer and itching to get out there, I inquire about the possibility of a show being recorded.

"Oh, I think so," she replies. "Jamie mentioned a friend bringing some audio equipment down for one of the gigs. I'd totally love to record it. People have asked about maybe an internet stream or whatever - I don't know, I don't know the cost involved, but I'm leaving no stone unturned! I'll try anything - just go for it! Fingers crossed I don't screw everything up! It's live, I like things in the moment, don't polish it up - just as long as it isn't a train wreck!"

Patti has come a long way since replying to an advert in the Village Voice all those years ago.

"Yeah, that's how it all started. I was always checking out the advertisements, still do," the singer reveals. "The Trans-Siberian Orchestra, I ended up doing their 'Beethoven's Last Night' record from an ad in Backstage Magazine. So yeah, I see this ad in the Village Voice and it just said something like 'International rock star is looking for a singer with comedic timing and an open mind'. It asked for video and photos. About two years before, in the same magazine, Dick Clark was doing a thing called 'USA Music Challenge'. It was

kind of like a 'star search' type thing. They categorised you, I was down as the rock chick. I got to do one of my own songs and I had a great video performance that had gone out on national television. So I sent that in, and the funny part was I'd just cut off all my hair. The only professional head shot I had was with long hair, so I sent the video, a little bio and the original head shot and then wrote on it 'Please turn over' and I had another picture, cut the hair out and taped it on the back! They decided they needed to find out who I was. I guess it wasn't every day they got a photo like that!"

It was quite a career leap to land such an impressive gig.

"I was working for a club band called Yasmin, which was the name of their former singer. She had left, the band kept the name and I jumped in. I was working with an Italian wedding band. I was actually making great money, but it just wasn't fulfilling. So I went to sing with this other band for \$40 a night doing three sets. That gave me the stamina, so when it came to finding that advert for Meat in the paper, I felt ready. From weddings to touring the number one record in the world. Talk about cutting the queue!" she laughs. "It was a trip, I'll tell you that. I didn't have time to think. Within a month of getting the gig, I had to fly to Australia with

him to do some TV shows. Already, that was like 'Holy crap!' I rolled with it I guess. I must have done something right, because I was there for twenty years!"

With her schedule packed due to the large tours and making albums with Meat Loaf, a solo career was something Patti considered but had never had time for until recently.

"Yeah - I never had a chance to do it. This year was a monumental turning of the numbers so I'm going for it. The fans are excited, I'm excited... as well as scared shitless! It's almost like I opened my mouth... oops, now I've got to deliver! I can't wait to get out there. I can't wait to rehearse actually, we haven't rehearsed yet, we start in a couple of days. It should be really interesting. That band - putting together a new band wasn't something I'd really thought hard about - I already knew all these guys, to bring them in, I know what they are about and we all have such a great time on stage together."

On a personal note, I had been a fan of Patti's since first seeing her perform alongside Meat Loaf. She enhanced my appreciation even more when I heard her perform at Queen's Day in Amsterdam with the remaining members of the legendary band, singing 'Another One Bites The Dust', 'The Show Must Go On' and duetting 'Under Pressure' with Roger Taylor.

"Oh my God, when that happened, it was so trippy! I met those guys right after I was finishing my stint as Esmeralda in 'Notre Dame De Paris'. Brian May called me up to meet Roger - I'd met Brian before but hadn't met Roger. They were getting ready to put together the US version of 'We Will Rock You'. Brian asked if I could come down and do an audition for Roger. So I met Roger and then I was involved in doing the reading for the show. I got to meet Robert De Niro, Andrew Lloyd Webber was there, it was pretty cool! He excused himself while I was talking to a friend of mine and he paid me a nice compliment and all I could think was 'Ooh, his coat is cashmere!'" she laughs. "Anyway, they ended up casting a different person as Killer Queen in the show. I went back with Meat and then I got a call saying they were doing Queen's Day in Amsterdam and they wanted me to sing. Had I been cast that first time in We Will Rock You, I couldn't have gone. They told me what I was going to be doing with them and I thought 'Oh my God!' So if you saw the footage, I wore a tiara on my hat! They had that big catwalk into that sea of a crowd, but I couldn't bring myself to go out there, I decided to play things safe. It was, dare I say - and pun intended, the crowning moment in my life. I'm *such* a huge fan."

"In fact, I remember before I even landed the Meat gig, I heard there was talk about them maybe going out again. At the time there were rumours it was going to be with Robbie Williams, so I called Hollywood Records, trying to speak to somebody. I don't know what I was thinking! But the

affirmations were going out there and boom, I end up connected with them - thank you God! Of course, eventually they went out with Paul Rodgers. Queen + Paul Rodgers were excellent, there was no need for any Freddie comparisons - Paul's a great singer who Freddie admired and it made for a great pairing. There was only one Freddie. I wanted to get up there though - let the band know that I could step in if Paul had a tickle in his throat, or if he fell off the stage with one of my stiletto shoes stuck in his back!" she laughs.

Patti was replaced on the tour for 'Bat Out Of Hell III: The Monster Is Loose' by her old colleague Aspen Miller. It wasn't the same and Patti eventually returned, as evidenced on the 'Guilty Pleasure' DVD.

"Oh, what a day - I was a mess. Getting ready for that show, I was super sick. I wasn't ready, they wanted me to have my hair straight, everything was so last minute, I was freaking out. I hope it didn't show too much! Coming back after Aspen Miller... I know Aspen, we worked together in We Will Rock You. When I found out she was doing the 'Three Bats Live' tour, I thought 'But

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she's theatre! I wasn't sure how she would handle all this. She has a great voice, she's an incredible singer but sometimes theatre people aren't as suited to that type of music. For me, personally, I was sad how things went down prior to 'Three Bats Live'. I had to walk away, things had happened and it was horrible. Professionally, there was no way I could do that job so I had to bail. It's sad... the whole business of putting Marion Raven on the album - I had an idea what was going on. I was told that in the UK and Europe, the versions of the songs I did would be on the record. To discover that everything was taken off, that was personal."

However, as evidenced with the advertisements she has replied to, the Queen connection she has formed and the achievements in her career, there seems to be some serendipity at work where Patti Russo is concerned.

"I'm a firm believer that things happen for a reason. I woke up one morning when I was song writing and said out loud that I knew Meat was going to call me. That same day,

I get an email from him asking if he could give me a shout. I called my mother and said 'Oh my God, am I a witch or what?'" Patti chuckles. "My life has been up, down, up... far from normal. Just yesterday, interview requests coming in, is this really all happening? Holy shit! From saying 'This is what I want to do', suddenly solo dates are booked, there's a band in place, people are talking to me, this thing's got a heartbeat!"

The excitement about striking out on her own is obvious.

"For the gigs, I think there will be quite a few people at the London show. For the others, whoever shows up, I'll appreciate it. I just want to have a great time doing it. If it went like a supernova and then just fizzled out, I'd be that crazy lady, that nutter who wanders around in old stage clothes with cigarette burns and food stains on, looking like Anne Bancroft in 'Great Expectations!'" Patti grins. "I actually said that as a joke years ago, I had this dream sequence, I was talking to the drum tech and I can't even remember what brought it on. It was like this vision of my future, I had this image in my head where I'm at my house and I come out in a dress like the one that was worn in the video for 'I Would Do Anything For Love'. It's all stained and ragged and I see a little kid walking by and I rasp 'C'mere kid, c'mere!' I sit him down on this stump and say 'Did ya know I used ta sing for royalty?' and it goes into this whole dream sequence showing my life, everything I've done, then it fades back to me in the stained, battered dress and I say 'So waddya think about that, kid?' He looks up at me and says 'Mamina, es a loco!' and he doesn't speak a word of English! I go 'Grrr, get outta here!' as he runs down the hill and I go back into my shitbox house, kicking chickens!" She bursts out laughing, before adding "Just promise me if that really happens, you won't print this!"

Patti plays the following dates on her debut tour:

Southampton - 10 April 2014
The Brook

Birmingham - 13 April 2014
O2 Academy

Sheffield - 17 April 2014
O2 Academy

Oxford - 19 April 2014
O2 Academy

Brighton - 21 April 2014
Komedia

Leicester - 23 April 2014
O2 Academy

London - 27 April 2014
O2 Academy Islington

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