

UNSUNG HEROES: TREANA MORRIS

Interview by James Gaden

Her music and voice have been heard on the most watched television show in the world, she's performed in front of Nelson Mandela and a member of Queen described her as "the finest girl singer I know". Yet Treana Morris may be the most unsung hero of this series so far...

Like many musicians, Treana Morris started young, but unlike the common story of starting on guitar, the singer began on instruments that were a lot less Rock And Roll.

"The first thing I had was a recorder at school and I played that a lot and got pretty good at it," she laughs, "before joining a brass band where I played the cornet. I then switched to the flugelhorn, and I played around the country doing that. We were doing a show for school and I had sung in a primary school play, so when I got to comprehensive school my name was put forward to be the singer in a school band. I didn't want to do it because I was very shy but eventually I agreed and it went from there."

It was during this early period that Treana would have a fateful meeting that would set her on the road to being a professional musician.

"There was a guy down there who was older than me, a producer called Gareth Young, and I used to go down to his studio after school, my dad would take me as it was down in Penzance and I started singing some of the songs that Gareth wrote. I was always heavily into music in some form, I also had piano lessons and I loved playing that. My parents bought me a little one for £50 and put it in the lounge, and they never once asked me to stop playing, which was amazing. They'd be sat watching *Eastenders* and I'd be sat there playing the piano. They weren't quite as keen on the recorder though! They even borrowed a drum kit for school holidays because I had this insatiable appetite for music. When everyone else was out clubbing, I was at home practicing. I joined a band aged about 14 I think – that was when I started playing shows. I started pretty young."

The fact that Morris can turn her hand to so many different instruments is not something that is widely known.

"I've been around musicians, good ones, for so many years and I was pretty good at asking for advice or tips, anything they could teach me. So I can play quite a few things, I wouldn't say I can play many of them well, but I can get by. While I was still at school, Gareth and I were working on songs and ended up being offered a deal and we signed with a company based in the States – I was 16 at that point if I remember rightly."

The deal came via Scotti Bros, a label home to an eclectic roster of artists that included Survivor, James Brown, 'Weird' Al Yankovic and Mother's Finest. Treana and Gareth released an album in 1991 called 'Contagious', simply under the name of TAG. The music was synth driven, polished 90s Pop with Dance and Electronica overtones, and the duo were due to get exposure most new acts could only dream of.



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"We made an album and then randomly ended up being involved with *Baywatch*, with one of our songs included on the *Baywatch* album," Morris acknowledges. The show's soundtrack album was also released via Scotti Bros and featured the now classic Jimi Jamison sung theme tune 'I'm Always Here', alongside songs sung by the show's star David Hasselhoff (which included co-writes with AOR gurus Jeff Paris and Mr Mister's Richard Page). It was rounded out with original tracks performed by other cast members, as well as featuring a tune from David Hallyday and a song from the legendary Beach Boys. However, TAG's involvement wasn't just limited to appearing on the album.



Morris' first recording act, TAG, in 1991

"We were also actually in an episode in season three, called 'The Dead Of Summer'," Treana recalls, referring to a segment where TAG were portrayed as a group performing on a pier. This meant they enjoyed the rare privilege of being introduced on-screen by a character and performed their track 'Don't Stop The Beat' in its entirety, almost like a music video, as oppose to the music simply being used in the background of one of the famous *Baywatch* montages.

"It keeps coming back to haunt me, that episode, friends keep posting it on my Facebook timeline!" Treana laughs. "We were asked to do it, we said yes and filmed for a couple of days which was quite cool. Then we got home and received a call saying they had messed up continuity and could we come back to re-shoot? So we did! It was fun."

Things would go quiet for TAG after a while, with Morris resurfacing via a duet on David Cassidy's song 'I'll Never Stop Loving You' from his 1992 album 'Didn't You Used To Be...'. Her next recorded lead vocals came with a single issued under her own name called 'Naked On You' in 1997. The track was also featured in *Baywatch*, with the popular beach based show at this point being the most watched programme in the world. The track was a precursor to her 1998 album 'Naked', a superb and classy Pop/Rock affair.

"We made one album as TAG and then we lost our deal," she reveals. "We then ended up being re-signed by the same company, who had been renamed the All American Music Group,

and the deal was now under my name instead of TAG – even though it was still Gareth and I writing together. The 'Naked' album came out in about 1998 but I don't think it was ever released in England. We played some shows in the States for it but they were not full band shows, they were more just acoustic. It felt odd going over to the States to do that, but we had a good time."

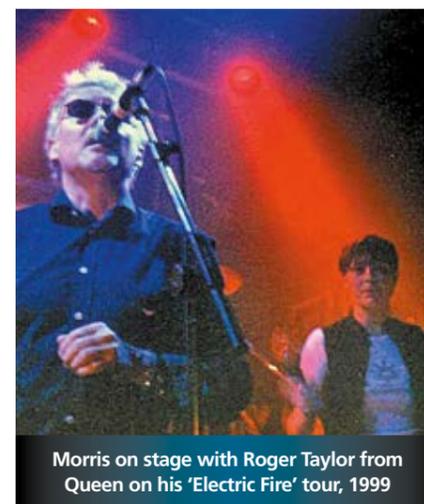
The year 1998 was important not only for the release of 'Naked', but for a chance meeting with none other than Queen's Roger Taylor, who would bring Treana on board to contribute vocals to his fourth solo album, 'Electric Fire'. Morris can be heard on the songs 'London Town (C'mon Down)' as well as the singles 'Pressure On' and 'Surrender', which saw her featured in the video as a counterpoint to the Queen percussionist.

"I met Roger by complete accident," Treana explains. "During the summer we'd play loads of gigs in Cornwall, five nights a week usually and we often played a place called the Ferryboat Inn, which is beautiful. I'm from Helston in Cornwall, so it wasn't too far, I knew the area. We finished playing and it was packed in there, it was a summer evening and we were just having some beers. Then Roger walked in. Our guitar player, Alden Evans, he is a massive Queen fan and he was inspired to learn guitar because of Brian May. He'd even written to Brian when he was a kid, so to have Roger walk in was a real 'Oh my God!' moment. People told us to go up and play some more so we could have chance to play in front of him, which I really didn't want to because I thought it was a bit cheesy, but we finally got up to do two songs, and Roger sat right next to Alden's mum. He watched us play and I thought that was that. Then a few days later we had a call from him, it turned out he'd gone to the bar manager after we had left and asked who we were and if he could have contact details for us! He phoned and said he really enjoyed our set and would I like to come and have a chat with him? So I met with Roger in a bar and the idea of working with him came up. I went to his studio and worked on some demos with him, then he asked if Alden and I would be up for doing a tour, opening for him. Of course we were both thrilled to have the opportunity but very nervous. It was an amazing experience for us to do, a lot of fun and we learned so much from that."

Playing with Evans as an acoustic duo, Treana played several songs from her 'Naked' album on that tour and also included an excellent version 'Sleeping On The Sidewalk', a deep cut from Queen's 'News Of The World' record.

"That was Alden's idea because of his love for Brian May – that was one of Brian's songs which he wrote and sang for Queen. When we played Wolverhampton, Brian was actually there because he joined Roger on stage for the encore. He was stood at the side of the stage watching us play his song, and when we came off he was very complimentary which was very nice. And Alden got to talk to him – Brian even let him play his guitar. He's such a nice guy!"

Morris was not done once the support slot was over however, as Taylor would summon her back on stage for his main set where she joined him for 'London Town', 'Pressure On', 'Surrender' and a great duet of 'Under Pressure',



Morris on stage with Roger Taylor from Queen on his 'Electric Fire' tour, 1999

where Taylor handled David Bowie's sections and Morris performed Freddie Mercury's – resplendent with an amazing replication of the sustained high note, singing the word "Why?" into the stratosphere, just as Mercury did on the studio version. It was a feat that blew this writer away when he witnessed it at the Sheffield Leadmill.

"Oh, you must have caught me on a good night, I'm not sure I nailed it every night!" she laughs modestly. "That is some note and you have to remember, Freddie was a man and there are lots of women who can't hit that! I don't think I'd be able to get up there today. They are just amazing songs to sing though, even if you're just in the room rehearsing. It's strange, when you think you know a song because you've listened to it loads, when we were rehearsing there was a bit where I thought 'Has Roger changed the arrangement? I'm sure this isn't right...' but I really didn't want to say anything, because we're playing Queen songs and Roger is in Queen! Eventually, really quietly, I said 'Isn't there like an extra little bit here?' and Roger and his band looked at each other and said 'Holy shit, yes, we've completely missed that.' So I was thrilled to have got that right! I was just thrilled to spend time with such great musicians who are so experienced really, I learned an awful lot."

Taylor completed his tour and would return to Queen related activities, so the next step for Treana was to put together a group of her own.

"When that tour was finished, Alden and I decided we should form our own band. We started

putting one together and that would become Wire Daisies. The record company I was signed with in America had been sold, so otherwise I'd have been twiddling my thumbs. Alden and I knew a drummer called Steve Jackson, he was keen and is one of the best drummers in the world in my opinion. Then we ended up having Jim Beach, Queen's manager, get involved. Everybody associated with Queen has been really great to us. Ollie Beach, Jim's son, he joined the band as our keyboard player and we put out our first album as Wire Daisies, toured with them and did pretty well on iTunes and stuff."

The band did well enough on the digital only label Transistor Project, co-founded by Dave Rowntree from Blur, that they caught the attention of EMI, who issued the debut album 'Just Another Day' physically in 2004. During that period, Morris would be asked to contribute to another project, this time for Queen. Nelson Mandela had launched an organisation called 46664 to help the fight against HIV/AIDS. After Mercury's death this was obviously a subject close to Brian May and Roger Taylor's hearts, so they contributed three brand new songs under the Queen banner for download. May penned a song entitled 'The Call' which he sang. Taylor offered 'Say It's Not True' (which would later be featured on the 'Return Of The Champions' live album and re-arranged on 'The Cosmos Rocks' album with Paul Rodgers) and another new track called 'Invincible Hope'. The latter was a rocker which featured May on guitar and bass, with Taylor on vocals and drums, as well as a spoken passage by Mandela. Taylor brought in Treana to add her voice alongside his own, making the track a duet, putting Morris in a very small, elite club of people who have performed lead vocals on a studio track credited to Queen.

This material acted as a precursor to an all star stadium concert in Cape Town, hosted by Mandela himself and featuring a huge collection of stars like The Eurythmics, Bob Geldof, Robert Plant, The Who, Peter Gabriel and many others. Treana was taken across to be part of the house band, and then found herself front and centre delivering one of Queen's most anthemic tracks.

"Yes, I sang 'The Show Must Go On' with Chris Thompson and Zoe Nicholas, who work a lot with the SAS Band," she says. "That was a very last minute decision, I was singing backing vocals and I was asked to come to the front to



Morris pictured with Wire Daisies, circa 2007

sing that only the day before, so I didn't have enough time to really panic about it. It's mental that I was shy at school and I ended up doing that. Beforehand I'm usually terrified, during and after I think it's amazing. Frankly I always thought of myself more as a writer, I never thought 'Oh, I want to be a singer' or be right at the front. That whole thing in South Africa was incredible though. I was part of the house band and we were over there rehearsing for two weeks, with people like Bob Geldof, Annie Lennox and loads of others just wandering in and out. It was a bonkers experience. Seeing South Africa was an eye opener as well and it was so generous of Roger and Brian to ask me to do that, it's a lovely thing to look back on. I think because so many people were there, oddly it's less daunting than an intimate crowd of twenty people whose faces you can see. And there was a big gap between them and the stage! The only downside was when Nelson Mandela was there, lots of people were having their pictures taken with him and I was there being all cool and I never got one – I really regret that now!"

Morris returned to The Wire Daisies and they issued a self titled second album in 2007 which contained a few more up-tempo tracks compared to it's breezy, laid back predecessor, but by that time they were running out of steam.

"After a while, Ollie wanted to do a solo project and I think motivation was a bit lacking at the time. I'd been in London and had been constantly going back and forth and felt I needed to establish myself somewhere, so I settled there



Photo: Siobhan Cox

After composing for TV in recent years Morris is currently working on a new album

for a while because I felt it was more vibrant and there was more going on musically than in Cornwall. And as much as I love Cornwall, it's so far away from everything that it was tough to do anything at short notice."

Upon relocation, Morris found herself discovering an outlet which was more suited to her desire to write music.

"A friend of mine, Drew Masters, is a composer and he was doing some work for a TV company and he pulled me in to do some work with him," she recalls. "He's a household name in that field, he does films and a lot of BBC dramas and because my name became associated with his, I got some more work out of it. I really enjoyed it, I find lyric writing the

hardest thing and for TV you don't have to, it's just music. I like composing on my own, I find it very therapeutic. I'd love to be asked to compose a film score. I think I even used my flugelhorn on one piece!"

Coincidentally, the idea to write this feature on Treana's career to date was quite serendipitous, as she takes this opportunity to reveal her latest project.

"I've just started recording an album actually, I've never actually done a solo album, that first was really me and Gareth, so last year I started. I've been working in music for the last ten years, composing stuff for television and writing songs for other people, touring with other people but I felt it's time to do my own thing. I'm getting on a bit and there's loads of stuff I want to say! It's funny how the universe works, because as soon as I started thinking about that, an opportunity to do it came up. I've spent about four weeks in the studio so far and have some more time booked, I'm so excited about it! I'm fortunate that I don't have to pay for the recording – Jo Partridge, who worked on 'War Of The Worlds', he has an incredible studio in Cornwall and he is basically co-producing it. I've been working with him and what we've done so far is sounding a bit more mature than the 'Naked' album, there's the odd Jazz element in there, some real song-writing. Hopefully by the end of the year I'll have a real body of work. It's all starting to come together."

Time will tell if Treana ends up laying down any riffs with her school recorder though...

ESSENTIAL MORRIS

5 releases which any true fan of the artist's work should experience...

Treana 'Naked' (1998)

Whereas TAG was very much synth driven Pop, Treana's debut album 'Naked' harkened more to the jangly guitar driven Pop Rock peddled by acts like Alanis Morissette, albeit it with less vitriol and more melodic vocals. Morris sounds superb on the catchy title track, the stunning 'I Don't Wanna Fly' the anthemic 'If You Want Me High' or the foot tapper 'I Wanna Be So Bad'. A forgotten 90s gem with no dud tracks.

Roger Taylor 'Electric Fire' (1998)

Called upon by Queen's drummer and occasional vocalist to contribute to his fourth solo album, Morris can be heard offering ethereal backing on 'Pressure On' and singing the chorus of the powerful 'Surrender' which deals with domestic abuse. Her voice is also present on the groovy, bass driven album closer 'London Town (C'Mon Down)'. Taylor regards the album as his most underrated and his use of a female counterpoint works extremely well.

Wire Daisies 'Just Another Day' (2004)

Formed with long term guitar player Alden Evans, Morris fronted the Wire Daisies who put together an impressive collection of laid back, Indie Rock. The opener 'Make Everything Change' saw the combination of Morris' superb voice and the droning guitar line build up to a catchy chorus, while 'Truth That Hurts' was perfect summer listening. The magnificent 'Butterfly' is also highly impressive. As "chill out" albums go, this is hard to beat.

Various Artists '46664: The Event'

Recorded in Cape Town and hosted by Nelson Mandela himself, this all star concert featured performances from the likes of Queen, Bob Geldof, The Corrs, U2, Anastacia, Peter Gabriel and The Eurythmics. Morris was part of the house band as a backing singer and got her moment front and centre delivering Queen's epic 'The Show Must Go On' with Chris Thompson and Zoe Nicholas, captured on this live album and DVD – a once in a lifetime occasion.

Wire Daisies 'Wire Daisies' (2007)

The second and final Wire Daisies album has more punch and energy than the first, opening with the rousing 'Wake Up' and driving things onwards with 'Tongue Tied'. Their talent for Pop gems is evident on 'Rocket Girl' and Morris delivers a sublime vocal on 'Lost My Way'. The juxtaposition of the Jazz infused 'Let Me Love You' and the more raucous efforts like 'Time Will Tell' and 'Roll Over' made this a fine way for the Daisies to bow out.