

BLONDE ON BLONDE

*As Blondie returns to play live in London, Debbie Harry tells **Sophy Grimshaw** why she's happy to be an honorary Brit*

Debbie Harry was born in 1945, and promptly given up for adoption. Growing up, she says she fantasised that her real mother was Marilyn Monroe – and maybe she was onto something. Harry certainly became the Monroe of the New York punk rock scene, with her band Blondie melding 1960s girl group influences with the fresh sounds of New Wave. 1978's *Parallel Lines* album brought the band global fame. They split in the early 1980s, but have been back together since 1997, and tour Europe this summer.

Blondie has always had a loyal fanbase in Britain; do you feel a strong connection to the UK?

"Yes, it's very magical and amazing for us to have the support we have there. It's partially due to the fact that we were [first] signed to a British label, and a lot of people initially thought that we were British, so they took us to heart. We first came to London in 1975 – quite a while ago! It's a city with so much culture to offer, and I have a lot of friends there."

What can we expect from your live shows this summer?

"We have recently recorded 15 or 16 new tracks, so we'll of course be wanting to play the new material, because it's exciting for us. But we realise from experience that the fans want to hear their favourites, and so we try to mix it up. One thing that will be fresh for the UK fans is a new video show that we've prepared – it's a nice complement to what we do on stage."

If there are that many new tracks, does that mean a new album, too?

"To start with we are going to release the songs on the internet for download,

and then there will be a product, but that's down the road. It's in the pipeline. I have collaborated with a lot of different people. Someone will give me a track [to write lyrics to] and I'll take it away and try and get moody with it."

Do you still enjoy touring?

"We only have five weeks on the road in Europe this summer, so it's not that gruelling. Once you get into the routine of it, get rolling and are used to the time-zone change, it's ok. It can be difficult when you're travelling long distances and you have to go and do a show the next night, that's tiring. But you get into a groove."

Did having time away from Blondie, to pursue other music and acting, make it more enjoyable to reform?

"Yes, and that continues. We work on a lot of different projects. Chris [Stein] is very interested in creating music for films, and people in the band write for other singers. The possibilities have really opened up in terms of contemporary music, because of the constant use of songs in advertising and film. That's very satisfying to me."

DEBBIE'S LONDON Favourite neighbourhood

"I love going down the old King's Road, which is a walk of memories, although it's changed quite a bit."

Favourite galleries

"I always look forward to going to the Tate (tate.org.uk), and I really want to go to the David Bowie show at the V&A (vam.ac.uk)."

Favourite Shops

"All of us in the band like to go shopping in the West End, that's always fun."

Long after Blondie split the songs stayed popular, didn't they?

"Yeah, and we were sort of amazed by that. The material has stood the test of time. We try to bring fresh sounds into the songs and sometimes change the arrangements. Sometimes we include a bit of another [artist's] song, in a breakdown section, so people can understand our frame of reference, what we're listening to. We reinterpret the songs. So it's not like we just stand up there and do it from blind memory. We really try and make the songs active and part of a contemporary scene."

You've always been celebrated for your style and beauty, but did you ever wish people would focus less on your looks?

"There's always that weird combination of your artistic endeavour, and also accepting the fact that it's showbiz. And I do accept that. So one of the first things we tried to achieve with Blondie was to have a really strong, organised visual appearance. That's something I look for in any band that I go to see. In Punk and New Wave people really took that to heart. A band like Devo would be one of the most obvious examples. And with Grunge, I don't know if I thought it was wonderful visually, but it was a unification of an idea, and it made a statement."

Which new bands do you like?

"I am a real fan of Die Antwoord, from South Africa. They're very fun and naughty and aggressive. And I like that."

Blondie plays live at the Roundhouse on 7 July and at Kew Botanical Gardens on 11 July. blondie.net



PHOTOGRAPH: CARA STRICKLER