

Elkie Brooks – Biography 2011

Elaine Bookbinder was born on February 25th, 1945 in Salford, Greater Manchester. Growing up in Prestwich with a Jewish background, Elkie only ever wanted to be one of two things; A PE teacher or a professional singer. Thankfully, she went on to become the latter, largely due to the influence of Rabbi Chazan Berkovits. A man with an incredible voice, his teaching and encouragement were instrumental in shaping the singer we know today. Her other influences were the great singers of the day, Ella Fitzgerald, Frankie Laine, Nina Simone and Billie Holiday all of which were a great source of inspiration for a teenage hopeful.

Elkie had her first break aged just 15 when she won a talent audition at Manchester's Palace Theatre, the prize being a place on the line-up of a national pop package tour, masterminded by local impresario Don Arden. This kickstarted her professional career, leading her to move to London and work with a variety of dance and jazz groups including the Eric Delaney and Humphrey Lyttelton bands. 'Humph' was very supportive of Elkie and her obvious talent and the two remained close friends until his passing in 2008. It was during this time that she chose to lose her birth name and after briefly appearing as Elaine Mansfield, she decided that something more memorable and unique was required and Elkie Brooks was born.

Whilst working with these bands was a valuable experience for a young singer, Elkie still yearned for a pop career, releasing her first single Something's Got A Hold Of Me (Originally recorded by Etta James and most recently by Christina Aguilera) in 1964 on the Decca Label. Elkie appeared on the bill alongside many big acts including The Animals, Carl Perkins and even The Beatles at the Hammersmith Odeon. The Odeon, or Apollo as it is now known went on to become a regular venue for Elkie throughout her career. She returned there recently to take part in the Humphrey Lyttelton tribute concert, where coincidentally, she was placed in the same dressing room she had used during The Beatle's 1964 Christmas show.

Solo success in The Sixties eluded Elkie and despite releasing several singles through Decca, HMV and NEMS she remained determined and continued to pay her dues on the club and cabaret circuits, learning her craft and taking whatever musical work came her way.

The 1970's provided new sounds, new music and new directions for Elkie when she met guitarist Pete Gage who would become her musical partner and first husband. They formed the band Dada and, as the line-up changed, there was the arrival of a young Robert Palmer. With Robert proving to be the perfect foil for Elkie, they fronted the band which became Vinegar Joe and they became one of the most electrifying Rock and R&B bands of the era. Hugely popular on the live scene, their rocky, raunchy live shows were the stuff of legend across the UK and Europe.

Vinegar Joe released three albums with Island Records but a chart topper eluded them and the band dissolved in 1974. Robert went on to enjoy his own solo career while Pete and Elkie took time to figure out their next move.

In 1975, A&M Records put a deal on the table to re-launch Elkie as a solo artist and she released her first album, Rich Man's Woman. The album did not give her the breakthrough she longed for but did manage to court controversy due to its cover artwork, which was pretty outrageous for the time. In 1977, producers Leiber & Stoller were brought in to work their magic for the album Two Days Away.

The album shot into the charts and featured the top ten singles Sunshine After The Rain and Pearl's A Singer which became widely recognised as her signature song and a staple part of her live show.

After a string of single releases which included the hits Lilac Wine and Don't Cry Out Loud, A&M masterminded the Pearls album which propelled Elkie to superstar status in the UK. The album came close to reaching Number 1 but despite just missing out on this, remained on the charts for over a year and a half.

Eager to continue this winning formula and maintain her success, Elkie released Pearls II, which soared up the charts reaching Number 5 and stayed in the top 75 for six months. This confirmed her status as one the UK's most popular entertainers.

Such was the success of the Pearls albums, Elkie's concerts in 1982 played to standing room only with many theatres having two shows a day. The tour was attended by over 150,000 fans.

Three more albums came out of her deal with A&M, the last of which was Screen Gems, an album of beautifully orchestrated songs from Hollywood's golden era. The album suffered from some poor marketing decisions and the fact it was initially only released on CD at a time when the format was in its infancy was perhaps to its detriment. By the time additional formats of the album could be printed, the marketing campaign had been wound down, giving the album little to no chance of success. Despite this, the album still achieved Gold status and the CD remains a very rare and collectable item to both fans and audiophiles alike and has been known to change hands for in excess of £250.

Breaking away from A&M allowed Elkie greater freedom in terms of the material she chose to write and record. After signing with the fledgling label Legend, the 1986 album No More The Fool was somewhat of a comeback for Elkie when it reached Number 5 in the charts and joined The Very Best Of Elkie Brooks at Number 10. The title song became her highest charting single to date reaching Number 5.

By this time Elkie was raising two sons and still managed to find time to record in the studio and perform live. Her relentless work ethic meant that she would regularly tour the UK and she was very much in demand throughout concert venues all over the country.

Her packed schedule of concert tours continued and over the next ten years, Elkie released a further seven albums. She was able to revisit her Jazz and Blues roots on albums such as 'Round Midnight and Nothin' But The Blues while the Amazing album saw her re-record her classic hits backed by the magnificent Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.

In 1997, The Guinness Book Of World Records recognised the fact that Elkie had more top 75 albums than any other British female artist over the last twenty years.

Although her recorded output ceased for some time Elkie continued to constantly work on the live circuit giving her time to plan her next move in an industry which had changed so dramatically throughout her career and which she had become completely disillusioned with.

In 2002 she released her somewhat experimental album Shangri-La produced by her eldest son Jay. Although widely disregarded by many, the album contains some of Elkie's most original and

adventurous material. At the same time she released the much lauded *Trouble In Mind* in collaboration with old friend and mentor Humphrey Lyttelton.

2005's critically acclaimed *Electric Lady* was regarded as a true return to form. The release came alongside a week long, sold out residency at Ronnie Scott's Jazz Club and the celebration of her 60th birthday. The album and a raise in profile started something of a renaissance for Elkie and the 2005 tour extended into 2006 with old fans returning in large numbers alongside a whole new generation of fans. Live concert success continued for the next few years as theatres and concert halls began to sell out on a regular basis and her reputation as a live performer became as strong as it ever was, if not more so.

2010 saw Elkie celebrate the 50th year of her professional career, a major achievement for any artist. Along with another sold out tour and a new Greatest Hits collection there was also the release of her 20th studio album, *Powerless*. Several years in the making, *Powerless* was a labour of love for Elkie and Jay. Featuring the title track written by Don Black, the fan favourite *Why* written by band member Lee Noble and some well chosen covers including Leon Russell's *Song For You*, she feels that the album contains some of her finest recorded vocals and it has been very well received by the fans.

After five eventful decades Elkie continues to look forward to the next stage in her career. Currently working on her autobiography she continues to do what she enjoys most, performing live. Elkie is happy and healthy, living on the North Devon coast which she made her home over 25 years ago. She describes her current band as the best she's ever had and as you will see tonight they enjoy it as much as she does.

In July 2012, Elkie will release her much anticipated autobiography, '*Finding My Voice*'. In this frank and moving book Elkie speaks about her successes, her childhood, her love of singing and also the hardships she has encountered throughout her musical career.

Despite reaching the age of 66 this year, Elkie has no plans to stop doing what she does and is proud to still be performing.