Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

ABBE LANE

Elisa Leonelli · Sunday, November 12th, 2023



Abbe Lane (c) Elisa Leonelli

I recently scanned for my archives a home photo layout that I did with Abbe Lane in Beverly Hills in 1977 and was published in the popular magazine *La Domenica del Corriere*. Some of you may remember her, and will be as surprised as I was to realize that she's still alive at age 90.



I knew about this sensual actress-singer because I grew up in Italy in the 1950s and 60s and she was quite popular at that time in my country. She appeared on television variety shows singing and dancing the cha-cha, the rumba and the mambo accompanied by the Xavier Cugat orchestra, the Cuban band leader who was her husband. She often played herself in movies, like *Lo Scapolo* (*The Bachelor* 1955) by Antonio Pietrangeli, where she danced with Alberto Sordi in a nightclub. She played leading roles in movies like *Tempo di villeggiatura* (*Time of Vacation*, 1956) opposite Vittorio De Sica, and most notably she starred with the amazing comedian Totò in *Totò, Vittorio e la dottoressa* (*The Lady Doctor*, 1957) also with De Sica, and *Totò, Eva e il pennello proibito* (*Totò in Madrid*, 1959) with Mario Carotenuto. You may watch this full movie here to get an idea of how the singer was an adept actress as the suave femme fatale.



When I met her in 1977, she was friendly and gracious, welcomed me into her home, opened her closet and showed me her clothes, we chose together the various outfits that she would wear during the shoot. She posed with her loving second husband, Perry Leff, their children, Andrew, 11 and Steven, 9, and their two dogs.

In the text that I wrote to accompany the photos, I said: "Abby Lane, at 41, is still young and beautiful, she continues to act, sing and dance. She is genuine and warm, not a plastic diva like so many others."



Perry Leff, Abbe Lane (c) Elisa Leonelli

I discovered many more details about her life during my research for this article: that she was born in Brooklyn to Jewish parents, at age 15 she met Xaiver Cugat, who was more than 30 years her senior, married him in 1952 at 19, divorced him in 1964, met Perry Leff (she calls him "the love of my life"), a lawyer, two days after her divorce was finalized, married him six months later. They

had two children, and were together until his death in May 2020.

Most relevant, in these days after #MeToo, in 1992 Lane wrote a semi-autobiographical novel, *But Where Is Love?* which described the painful memories of a teenage girl married to an older man. You should watch this interview to hear the story for her own lips.

I found lots of videos of Abbe Lane performing songs, among her numerous appearances on the Ed Sullivan Show, I suggest you watch her sing “My Man” in 1967 when she was 27-years-old.

And to prove that she really was a powerful singer, you may watch this medley at the 1977 MDA (Muscular Dystrophy) Telethon, when she was introduced by Jerry Lewis.

Abbe Lane with Elisa Leonelli

All my best wishes to Abbe Lane.

Text and photos by Elisa Leonelli

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