



THE AGE OF INNOCENCE

Carried on the tide of her mother's ambitions, **LINDA LEWIS**, a black working class teenager from London's East End, found herself caught in the cultural crosshairs of the '60s mod, soul and hippy movements. **GREG HEALEY** talks soul clubs, hippy communes and the vagaries of the music business with the still active singer-songwriter



"My mum took me to this club in Southend, because she knew someone who ran it," says Lewis of the ordinary afternoon in 1964 that kicked off an extraordinary career in the music business. "I wouldn't have got in if I wasn't with my mum. It was one of those daytime things down in this basement place and it was all very, 'Wow, what's going on?'"

Although only 14 years of age, with a spell at Peggy O'Farrell's School of 100 Wonderful Children and parts in films like *A Taste Of Honey* under her belt, Lewis was, however, no novice. Well familiar with the "cattle market" of auditions, she knew chances had to be taken.

Dressed for impact in a mini skirt, as was her "beautiful, buxom mum", Lewis found herself invited onstage to sing the

Martha Reeves & The Vandellas hit 'Dancing In The Street' with none other than John Lee Hooker. "I don't know if he was impressed with me, but he was *very* impressed with my mum," explains Lewis. "That was the whole thing – my mum was very ambitious for me. She wanted to be a singer but never had the chance." Maternal ambition and the art of persuasion '60s style aside, this performance would prove to be a turning point for Lewis when Hooker suggested that the young singer meet his manager, Don Arden.

Arden's nicknames, Mr Big and The Al Capone Of Pop, give an indication of his somewhat terrifying reputation. A former stand up comedian and music hall performer, he was a hugely influential figure in the music business of the time, looking after a range of acts that included Jerry Lee Lewis, Gene Vincent, Little



Linda Lewis steps off The Ferris Wheel, London, 1970

Richard, The Small Faces and The Move. His unconventional business methods, usually enforced by a cohort of bruisers, allegedly involved anything from beatings to kneecappings, are the stuff of showbiz legend. On one occasion, according to Garth Cartwright's 2007 *Guardian* newspaper obituary, Arden showed his displeasure at John Hawken of The Nashville Teens by trying to hang him out of the second storey window of his Carnaby Street offices. A similar fate is said to have befallen the impresario Robert Stigwood when he tried to poach The Small Faces.

Despite her tender age, Arden did not pull his punches when dealing with Lewis. After a brief audition, in a studio on Carnaby Street, she was paired with the in-demand producer/songwriter Ian "Sammy" Samwell who, amongst other things, wrote 'Whatcha Gonna Do About It' for The Small Faces. "I got told off by Don Arden. He said that my diction 'was not up to scratch'. I was listening to some of the sounds and I couldn't always hear what they were singing so I just sang how it sounded. I remember him picking me up and putting me on this desk – he was in my face and going, 'You've got to be fashioned out.' He sent me off to this hairdressers in Hampstead and I had this lovely mod hairstyle and all the mod things that went with it – which my mum could never afford. And then it all started happening. Although I'd had lots of things I'd done when I was young I was this little kind of shy thing. So to go into this place in Swinging London and be faced with this guy who seemed to be shouting all the time and very critical of everything – I just wondered why he was doing it. But Ian Samwell was helping and he backed me and he believed in me."

A demo was made of Mary Love's 'You Turned My Bitter Into Sweet' and, after a bit of hawking around, Linda Lewis was picked up by Polydor. "My first single was a Mary Love song because Ian Samwell introduced me to lots of American music that I'd never heard before. I'd heard Motown stuff on pirate stations but he really introduced me to unusual music that you wouldn't hear. I was nervous because I recorded this song whilst I was still at school and it had people like Jimmy Page and John Paul Jones on it just as session players. I was like, 'Oh god, I can't sing.' It was in the days when you did it all together and I was in a little box cordoned off from the rest of the band in this huge studio."

Around this time, under the instruction of her new record label and Arden, Lewis changed her name from her birth name of Fredericks. Apparently this was due to concerns that she might be confused with another Polydor artist, Linda Kendrick. "Don Arden said he didn't like my name and I was thinking what can I do? I liked an American lady called Barbara Lewis and

I also thought the Lewis with the Linda sounded like Lois Lane, Superman's girlfriend."

Despite an age gap of 14 years Lewis quickly became smitten by the worldly charm of Ian Samwell as he took her under his wing. After the release of 'You Turned My Bitter Sweet' in '67, Samwell broke away from Arden's sphere of influence and took over the running of the young singer's career. Linda would also make a change in her personal life, leaving the convent school she attended. However, more significant change was soon to follow.

Ian Samwell was around 30 years old at this time and had developed a good reputation in the industry. As the original guitarist in Cliff Richard's backing band The Drifters, Samwell had written the singer's influential debut hit 'Move It'. Eventually Samwell would take up the role of deejay at The Lyceum Ballroom. It was here he used his contacts to bring the new sounds from the US R&B scene to eager British ears.

"I started bringing a different influence on Ferris Wheel. I would suggest, 'Why don't we do it this way or why don't we do it that way', and we became more of a psychedelic soul band"

Lewis was gigging regularly, earning a name for herself playing clubs and revue bars, but the late nights and trips away from home, along with her burgeoning romance with Samwell, began to cause tensions with her mother. "Some of the clubs I was playing, like The Flamingo, were very late night places and I couldn't get home. So I used to tell her I was staying at a friend's house," recalls Lewis. "Ian Samwell had a little boy and we brought him round to my mum's house while I went out and did some gigs. He must've told my mum because when I came back she grabbed Sammy by the throat and pushed him against the wall and said, 'Leave my daughter alone. She's not there for that purpose.' He promised that it was never going to happen again. But then it did. And when my mum found out again she chucked me out. I was like freeeee. I was so happy. I remember walking down Victoria Dock Road and thinking, 'Thank God I'm out of this

place,' because everyone used to fight on a Saturday night and it was just a big chaotic place."

Having escaped from The East End, Lewis moved into a small flat with Samwell and then, eventually, into a "nice posh house in Hampstead". Here they would set up a commune – the essential lifestyle choice for any self-respecting hippie at the dawn of the '70s. Conceived as a place where musicians and artists could hang out, it was founded with Jeff Dexter, the prominent scenester known for his mod associations and spells deejaying at The Lyceum and Middle Earth. Something of a magnet to the emerging stars of the day, who came round to sample the mix of drugs, music and spaced-out philosophy, it developed as an open, mellow scene where songs were written and poetry was performed.

"It was just me, Sammy and Jeff to begin with and then more people came. Jeff was involved with the first Glastonbury, so I got to sing at that as well. People used to come in and out, like Marc Bolan, David Bowie and Cat Stevens – there were people coming in and out and we'd all sit about and smoke dope and drink tea. John Martyn used to come round. He was the guy who got me up playing – just me and my guitar. Sammy had bought me this guitar that used to belong to Eric Clapton's girlfriend, Alice Ormsby Gore, who unfortunately OD'd. I've still got it and I've written so many songs on it. But I went to see John Martyn at Les Cousins in Soho and he just said, 'Come on, come up and sing with your guitar.' I started doing that and all of a sudden I had this following who used to just come and see my gigs with my guitar. I loved John Martyn. That was when he was with his wife, Beverly, and they did that beautiful folk stuff, so I kind of started off on my own a bit folksy. Whilst I was at the house there was always excitement when a new artist came out, like Joni Mitchell or Laura Nyro. We'd put it on and we'd all sit around and listen in amazement."

When it came, that fashionably bucolic existence in the garden suburbs of Hampstead would sit in marked contrast to Lewis's life as a working musician. After a brief spell in an outfit called White Rabbit with Junior Marvin (who would later gain fame with Bob Marley & The Wailers), the departure of Marsha Hunt from The Ferris Wheel created an opportunity for Lewis; she joined the band with their gruelling schedule of gigs in '69. "We toured a lot! All the clubs up and down the country. We'd do double headers where we'd do something up north and then come down and do like the clubs in London – travelling round in one of those little vans where you'd put all the equipment in the back and we'd all sit up front. I remember we used to do The Twisted Wheel."

After The Cavern, The Twisted Wheel



Getting back to nature circa '71. Plus, clockwise from top left: '67 press cutting; that year's debut single; Ferris Wheel promo; songwriter and producer Ian Samwell; manager Don Arden; friend and mentor John Martyn; the second Ferris Wheel album; '69 appearance at Rome's Piper Club

is perhaps the most famous of the huge number of music venues that were found in towns and cities across the land. Opened in Manchester by brothers Ivor, Jack and Phillip Abadi in '63, it was one of the first venues to play what became known as northern soul. Going through various incarnations in different locations during its existence the Wheel operated as an R&B club, a mod club and a soul club as tastes changed. Its DJs were known for their rare grooves that couldn't be heard elsewhere. According to manchester-beat.com, The Twisted Wheel was particularly famous for its all-nighters and its range of top live acts. These included Sam & Dave and Geno Washington – as well as local turns like Manchester band St

Louis Union. The website also notes that "The Wheel went a trifle upmarket" as the era of soul music came to an end. The Ferris Wheel was born out of the wreckage of Emile Ford & The Checkmates, The West Five and one half of a duo, created under Simon Napier-Bell's tutelage, called Diane & Nicky. Mike Liston, from The West Five, would become The Ferris Wheel's main songwriter under the name of Michael Snow, and the group's name was a corruption of the singer Diane Ferraz's name. Their Pye debut, the John Schroeder-produced LP *Can't Break The Habit*, came out in '67 and combined psych-pop filigree with soulful drive. Despite Schroeder's pedigree as a hit-

maker (he co-wrote 'Walkin' Back To Happiness', 'Don't Treat Me Like A Child' and 'You Don't Know' for Helen Shapiro in '61) the album and its singles flopped. Regarded by Jim Dunn of allmusic.com as "one of England's lost musical treasures of the mid to late '60s", The Ferris Wheel's Motown meets psychedelia vibe made them "immensely popular among club audiences". Unfortunately this grass roots support, in the sweaty nooks and crannies of the nation's underground music scene, failed to translate into chart success. By '68 Ferraz had departed the band, to be briefly replaced by Marsha Hunt, before Hunt herself left to join the cast of *Hair*. Lewis joined the group at a time of flux, as various members came and went



Linda Lewis



in quick succession. Drummer Barry Reeves was replaced by the 18-year-old Dennis Elliot. Elliot would later find success with Foreigner after spells in The Roy Young Band and playing for Mott The Hoople's Ian Hunter. Guitarists would also come and go until, rather significantly for Lewis as it later turned out, former Blossom Toes guitarist Jim Cregan joined the group. In time Lewis and Cregan would become lovers, marry and form a fruitful creative partnership that played out on Linda's solo albums.

Lewis's impact on The Ferris Wheel's sound is undeniable

and it is clear that by the age of 19 her confidence had grown. This would show up in various and unusual ways on the group's eponymous and final album which was released on Polydor in '70. "I started bringing a different influence on Ferris Wheel. I would suggest, 'Why don't we do it this way or why don't we do it that way, and we became more of a psychedelic soul band. That's when some of my songs started to get recorded, like 'Little Indians' and 'Song For Alice'. 'Song for Alice' was influenced by Laura Nyro because it went through all kinds of time changes. I introduced them to Ian Samwell and he produced that record at Trident Studios."

Lewis shared vocal duties with Mike Snow, with their expressive, oddly compatible styles reaching a kind of, er, climax on the Danny Kaye song 'Ugly Duckling'. Recorded with full orchestra in "a lovely big studio", Linda's version of the duckling's transformation into a swan took an unusual and ecstatic turn. "When I turned into a swan, and I didn't realise it was going to go that way, everyone was like, 'You sound like you're having an orgasm!'"

The Ferris Wheel split soon after the

album's release but Lewis, by now ensconced in the conducive confines of Samwell's spacious Hampstead commune-like home, was already writing her own songs and working towards her own sound. The chance to play Glastonbury Fair in '71 brought focus to what had thus far only been a loose collection of nebulous compositions that followed none of music's traditional rules. However, this free-style approach would remain at the heart of what she did for some time after.

At Glastonbury Lewis found herself enjoying some exotic pre-show treats with David Bowie and Terry Reid. "I'd met David when he'd come to the house in Hampstead. He was shy like me, so it was like who's going to talk first. When we did Glastonbury, Terry Reid, David Bowie and me were sat about and we decided to take some mushrooms. I can't really remember what happened after that but someone came up and tapped me on the shoulder and said, 'You're on, you're playing.'" Continuing, Lewis elaborates on the turn of events that would see her turn in a striking performance on 'Panic In Detroit' on Bowie's *Aladdin Sane*. "David liked what I did. And I'd started to get a name - I think I was described as an instrument that could do all kinds of things from a cello to a flute. People used to hire me just because of my unique kind of voice. So he invited me. He said, 'Sing what you want, just get the feel.'"

Samwell's own rise had continued apace and by the end of the '60s he was working for Warner Brothers' UK wing. His producer credits from this time include The Aynsley Dunbar Retaliation in '69 and America's debut in '71. His connection with Warners would help secure Lewis a record deal with Warners' Reprise label as a singer-songwriter.

"Sammy was working for Warner Brothers and Ian Ralfini, who was the Warners head, used to come round the house. One day he came for dinner and heard me singing on my guitar and he just signed me up. I don't know if it was manipulated for him to do that. I was not aware of a lot of things - I was quite innocent in the whole thing and I was like, 'This is great, woo, I love this.' I was like a dopey blond."

Recorded in Trident Studios, with Samwell overseeing as producer and co-writer on some songs, and the esteemed Ken Scott as engineer, '71's *Say No More* featured the talents of renowned session men Chris Spedding and Ray Cooper. Pentangle's drummer Terry Cox and King Crimson multi-instrumentalist Ian McDonald also appear.

Unfortunately, the recording process was not all Lewis had hoped for and she found her freeform songs reworked to fit a more traditional musical discipline. "Some of the things I'd written were not in the four bars and then you go here style, so we got Jimmy Horowitz the arranger in. I remember all the musicians sitting round and I thought, 'Oh my God, they're not

playing it like I wrote it.' It was all in a very particular, bum, bum bum and then you change here. I wasn't satisfied with it at the time."

Say No More reflects the youth and naivety of someone who was "just in it for laugh... wafting around and talking about animals and flowers and stuff like that." Despite this, and the straightjacket imposed on it by Horowitz, it remains a beguiling album.

Still only 21, Lewis remained under Samwell's wing, but with her future collaborator and husband Jim Cregan already around, the next stage of her life and her music was already signposted.

Her next album, *Lark*, would reflect both her growing maturity and love for Cregan, as well as his creative influence. "With *Lark* it was more about love. Even though I was still living with Ian Samwell in Hampstead, most of the songs were written about Jim. I imagined myself as the kind of person who needed to spread light around. At first we were going to call the album *Light*."

Cregan would act as producer and play guitar on *Lark*, which was recorded at Apple Studios with in-house engineer Phil

"When we did Glastonbury, Terry Reid, David Bowie and me were sat about and we decided to take some mushrooms. I can't really remember what happened after that"



Feline groovy. Linda and friends in the early '70s; early albums and hit single (opposite)

McDonald. The experience seems to have been a much better one for Lewis. She'd fallen in love with Cregan and, surrounded by familiar faces such as Cregan's Family band mate Poli Palmer and Gerry Conway from Cat Stevens' band, the vibe was more positive all round. "I used to love going to Apple, I loved the atmosphere. It was like having a holiday all the time. In the studio we were just mucking about and doing our work. It was just one those things where you invite people and they come and play. I remember George Harrison used to put his head round the door sometimes and say, 'Oh that's sounding good.' George was lovely. They were such creative times. I had a great deal of power to put my say in and Jim helped me to get my creative stuff out."

Lewis had left the commune and moved in with Jim Cregan "in his little flat in

Chiswick", where she was "was madly in love and it seemed like it was summer all the time." However, despite this state of reverie her record label demanded a hit single. 'Rock A Doodle Doo' which, as Lewis explains, was the product of a dream, was her chart-storming response to this call. "I was on this fruit machine in the dream and I pulled the arm and it came out 'Rock A Doodle Do' and all this money came gushing out. And I thought, 'Ah, that's interesting'. The next day I wrote around that title and wrote a little story about two youngsters who were in love."

Released in '73 on Warners' Raft Records offshoot, 'Rock A Doodle Doo' peaked at #15 that July, around the time that third album *Fathom's Deep* hit the shops.

A more mature prospect, the Jim Cregan produced *Fathom's Deep* foregoes the folky

idiosyncrasy of previous solo efforts for a more coherent soul funk sound. Graced by slick performances from a stellar cast of musicians, such as Bobby Tench and Max Middleton of The Jeff Beck Group, Pentangle's Danny Thompson and session man Phil Chen, it was released to critical acclaim. Unfortunately, however, even an endorsement from Stevie Wonder, an influence on both Cregan and Lewis at the time, could not help with poor sales and the surprise insolvency of Raft Records.

Despite this setback, a bright future beckoned. The East End girl, with the versatile voice and the extraordinary five-octave range, was a little girl no more. In many ways, her career had just begun. [E]

With special thanks to Christian John Wikane

Funky Bubbles is out now on Easy Action