



MY BABY'S ALWAYS THE ONE TO TRY THE THINGS THEY'VE NEVER DONE AND JUST BECAUSE OF THAT THEY SAY HE'S A REBEL AND HE'LL NEVER BE ANY GOOD

HE'S A REBEL 'CAUSE HE NEVER EVER DOES WHAT HE SHOULD BUT JUST BECAUSE HE DOESN'T DO WHAT EVERYBODY ELSE DOES THAT'S NO REASON WHY I CAN'T GIVE HIM ALL MY LOVE

DARLENE LOVE

[BY ANDY SCHWARTZ]



HE'S A REBEL," "He's Sure the Boy I Love," "(Today I Met) The Boy I'm Gonna Marry," "Wait Til' My Bobby Gets Home," "Christmas (Baby Please Come Home)"—if Darlene Love had sung lead only on these five songs and then disappeared from public view, she *still* would be counted among the finest female vocalists in sixties pop music.

But Love sang much more than just those five songs. Her story is the complex tale of a "singer's singer"—one whose *sound* has been far more familiar to the mass audience than her face or her name. Only after years of struggle did a combination of abiding faith, courageous determination, and sheer talent propel her into the solo spotlight.

Darlene Love continues to delight audiences around the world with her richly expressive voice and contagiously exuberant stage presence. Her live show is no rote "oldies" revue but a multifaceted showcase for her matchless vocal artistry.

Darlene Love was born Darlene Wright on July 26, 1941, in Los Angeles,

the second of Joseph and Ellen Wright's five children, and the couple's eldest daughter. (Darlene's younger sister Edna Wright later became the lead singer for seventies pop-soul trio Honey Cone of "Want Ads" fame.)

Joe Wright was a Pentecostal minister, and the church provided Darlene's earliest musical influences and training. Later, she was moved by the stately spiritual recordings of Marian Anderson, and she delighted in the forbidden thrill of early R&B hits like Hank Ballard and

the Midnighters' "Annie Had a Baby." Darlene began singing with junior high school groups while her family was living in San Antonio, Texas.

In 1958, back in Los Angeles and a senior at Fremont High School, she overcame her parents' initial objections and joined Gloria Jones, Fanita Barrett, and Nanette Williams in their vocal group the Blossoms (Darlene replaced Nanette's pregnant sister Annette).

The Blossoms recorded as a quartet for Capitol Records and then, following Nanette Williams's departure, as a trio for the Challenge and OKeh labels. Although none of these discs became hits, the three women's versatility, professionalism, and

HERS IS THE COMPLEX TALE OF A "SINGER'S SINGER"

flawless harmony soon made them the most in-demand backing vocalists on the fast-growing L.A. session scene.

Shelley Fabares's "Johnny Angel," James Darren's "Goodbye Cruel World," "Rockin' Robin" by Bobby Day: By mid-1962, "the Blossoms were singing on as many as three sessions a day, sometimes for nine hours straight," Darlene recalled in her 1998 autobiography, *My Name Is Love: The Darlene Love Story* (co-written with Rob Hoerburger). "Almost overnight, we were making boatloads of money, \$22.50 an hour, sometimes \$200 or \$300 a session"—this at a time when, according to U.S. Census Bureau figures, median U.S. family income was about \$6,000 per year.

Also by 1962, 21-year-old Phil Spector had begun to forge his reputation as the neurotically demanding but hugely talented producer of such hits as the Paris Sisters' "I Love How You Love Me" and the Crystals' "Uptown." Anxious to cut the new Gene Pitney composition "He's a Rebel" and unable to hustle the Crystals from New York to L.A. fast enough to suit him, Spector simply brought the Blossoms into Gold Star Studios in L.A. and rushed the spectacular results to market as the Crystals' new single.

"He's a Rebel" would go down in pop-music history as one of Darlene Love's all-time greatest performances and as the first Number One single for Spector's own Philles Records. Its success left the original Crystals with bruised feelings, but Spector couldn't

have cared less and deployed Darlene as lead singer on the group's next release, the Number Eleven hit "He's Sure the Boy I Love." (She also sang on the original recording of "Da Doo Ron Ron," but Spector, in one of his frequent fits of vengeful pique, stripped off her voice and replaced it with that of LaLa Brooks for the final version, which reached Number Three.)

Love sang on two Spector-produced hits by Bob B. Soxx and the Blue Jeans, "Zip-A-Dee Doo-Dah" and "Why Do Lovers Break Each Other's Heart?" Most significantly, Darlene Love (as Spector had rechristened her) released three superb Philles singles under her own name—"Today I Met) The Boy I'm Gonna Marry," "Wait Til' My Bobby Gets Home," and "A Fine Fine Boy"—as well as "Christmas (Baby Please Come Home)," a recording of tidal-wave intensity that still can be heard in heavy yuletide rotation across the nation.

But none of these discs reached the Top Ten, and the intensely singles-minded Spector never issued a Darlene Love album. Combined with the lure of steady session income and her own distaste for touring under the primitive conditions of the era, this meant that the singer never established herself as a sixties solo artist in the manner of Aretha Franklin or Dionne Warwick.

Nonetheless, Darlene Love and the Blossoms (now with Fanita Barrett and Jean King) stayed plenty busy throughout the sixties, and not just in the recording studio. From September 1964 until January 1966, the trio appeared weekly on the ABC network show *Shindig!*, and YouTube has preserved the Blossoms' soulful



THIS PAGE

Darlene Love in the early sixties; with the Blossoms, 1964; backing Marvin Gaye on The T.A.M.I. Show, 1964.

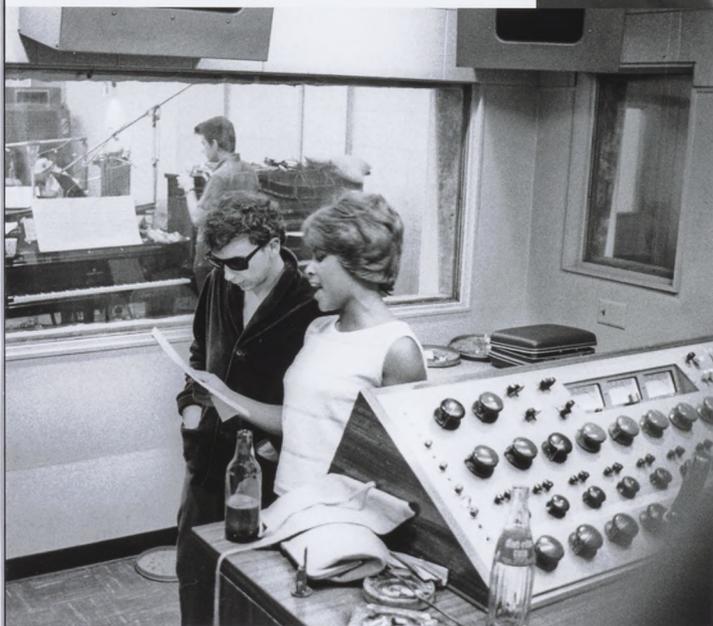
OPPOSITE PAGE

With Phil Spector and Cher; at Gold Star Studios with Spector.

renditions of then-contemporary hits like the Toys' "A Lovers Concerto."

The Blossoms sang and danced behind Marvin Gaye in the 1964 concert documentary *The T.A.M.I. Show*, backed Elvis Presley on his 1968 comeback TV special, and toured with Tom Jones. The group released more (non-hit) singles of its own, including the uptempo soul stormer "That's When the Tears Start" on Reprise and a gorgeous rendition of Laura Nyro's "Stoney End" for Lou Adler's Ode Records. Even after leaving the Blossoms, Love found several years of steady work on tours with Dionne Warwick and Aretha Franklin.

In the early seventies, Love made the decision to give up background singing to focus on a solo career—but her efforts came to naught. A promising contract



IT'S CLEAR
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with Kenny Gamble and Leon Huff of Philadelphia International was bought out by none other than . . . Phil Spector, who kept the singer on ice for several years at his ill-fated Warner-Spector label. Showcases in Los Angeles and New York inspired standing ovations and critical hosannas, but no record deals. By 1982, Darlene Love—singer's singer and respected music-industry veteran, but also a 40-year-old divorced mother still caring for her three sons—was doing domestic work in the mansions of the Hollywood Hills and waiting on customers at a friend's dry-cleaning business.

In 1983, New York impresario Allan Pepper recruited Love to join the cast of a musical revue he was putting together at his club the Bottom Line. *Leader of the Pack* was built around the songs of Ellie Greenwich, the co-composer (usually with then-husband Jeff Barry) of "Da Doo Ron Ron," "(Today I Met) The Boy I'm Gonna Marry," "Be My Baby," and other Brill Building classics. Another of the show's highlights was Paul Shaffer's wickedly funny impersonation of Phil Spector. As a longtime Love fan and supporter, Shaffer has backed the singer every December of her twenty-four consecutive holiday performances on David Letterman's show.

ODE TO DARLENE

Talk about talent. Staying power. Passion. And sheer determination. Darlene Love could write the book. How could a girl who grew up in a religious family in which she was not allowed to listen to pop music have such an amazing career in show business? Her early influences were not rock or pop stars but Mahalia Jackson, Marian Anderson, and Clara Ward.

I remember bumping into my friend from South Philadelphia, actor and singer James Darren, who told me about this incredible girl group called the Blossoms who were backup singers on his recording sessions in the early sixties.

I also heard about her from Lester Sill, who had just formed Philles Records with Helen Noga, Harry Finfer, and Phil Spector. Lester introduced Darlene to Phil after seeing her with the Blossoms, who were backing Jackie DeShannon at the Troubadour.

Phil had sent me his first release with the Crystals, "Oh Yeah, Maybe Baby" backed by "There's No Other Like My Baby." I played the B side, and it became the hit. I played their second release, "Uptown," and then Phil sent me the demo of their third release, "He's a Rebel." As soon as I heard it, I knew that it was not Barbara Alton singing lead. It was Darlene. When Phil had first heard the song, which was written by Gene Pitney for Vikki Carr, he wanted it for the Crystals, but he was in Los Angeles and wanted to get the jump on Liberty Records' version of the song. Thus, the Blossoms became the West Coast Crystals, with Darlene Love singing lead.

In 1963, Phil sent me Darlene's solo record, "(Today I Met) The Boy I'm Gonna Marry." Now the lady had arrived under her own name. With that and songs like "(He's a) Quiet Guy," "Stumble and Fall," and "Wait Til' My Bobby Gets Home," she displayed a distinctive power and sensitivity that illuminated the Spector sound, especially on the 1963 album A Christmas Gift for You.

I finally met Darlene in 1965 when she was appearing with the Blossoms on Shindig! NBC's Hullabaloo had started to steal their ratings and the show needed some new blood. I had a nationally syndicated TV show out of Philadelphia, and Shindig!'s producer, Jack Good, invited me to the West Coast to discuss the possibility of my hosting a segment of the show: Darlene once again knocked me out.

Most recently, I hosted a show at Philadelphia's Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts with Darlene as headliner. Backed by a twenty-two-piece orchestra, she brought down the house. She is one of the few artists who still sings her repertoire in the same key as when she began. Darlene is not only the ultimate performer but the ultimate professional, generous to other performers and a joy to work with. Tonight we welcome her to her rightful place in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

— JERRY "THE GEATOR" BLAVAT

THIS PAGE *Live in 2003.*
OPPOSITE PAGE *The singer's singer in 2008.*



Leader of the Pack played the Bottom Line in two separate monthlong engagements: The sold-out crowds and laudatory reviews combined to raise Love's public profile higher than at any time since her Philles discs of twenty years earlier. Love stayed with the show when it moved to Broadway in 1985, where *Leader* was nominated for a Tony Award for Best Musical and a Grammy Award for its original-cast album. (On the home front, Love was happily married to her third husband, Alton Allison.)

In 1987, Love played the supporting role of Danny Glover's wife, Trish Murtaugh, in *Letbal Weapon*, co-starring Glover and Mel Gibson. The film did boffo box office, and the singer went on to repeat her role in three sequels over ten years. Screen acting, she wrote, "let me just enjoy my job without having to watch my back every second or worry about getting paid or getting credit. . . . And after all the years I had been singing, who would have thought it would be this bit part that struck the most resonant chord in the average fan?"

In February 1993, Darlene Love returned to the Bottom Line—this time as the star of her own well-received show, *Portrait of a Singer*—and in 1995, Love won a Pioneer Award from the Rhythm and Blues Foundation. In the early months of 1996, she appeared in another musical revue, *20th-Century Pop . . . A Musical Celebration*, this time co-starring with Marianne Faithfull and Merry Clayton for a highly successful run at the haute cabaret Rainbow and Stars in Rockefeller Center. (The trio also made a special appearance at the 1996 Rock and Roll Hall of Fame induction ceremony.)



In 1997, Darlene Love won a judgment in New York State Supreme Court against Phil Spector and was awarded \$263,000 in unpaid royalties. In the new millennium, Love has raised the roof as Motormouth Maybelle in the Broadway production of *Hairspray* and toured Australia in a road company of *Fame: The Musical*. She has also released such noteworthy albums as the live *Age of Miracles* and her first gospel collection, *Unconditional Love*.

Because her career has been so varied and has never been defined by one massive comeback album on the order of Tina Turner's *Private Dancer*, today Darlene Love enjoys a singular degree of artistic freedom. Once past the requisite Spector favorites, she's free to sing anything she wants—and so she has, from Dan Hill's "Sometimes When We Touch" to James Brown's "Santa Claus Go Straight to the Ghetto."

Writing in the *New York Times* in 1997, Stephen Holden may have said it best: "Pure joy is a quality many singers try to fake, only to end up sounding obsequiously goody-goody. But with Darlene Love . . . it's clear from the first triumphal note that she's projecting the real thing." ❀

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