

**This interview with
CYNDI LAUPER
was conducted by the Library of Congress
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LIBRARY OF CONGRESS: Almost from the moment of its release, “Girls Just Want to Have Fun,” the first single from “She’s So Unusual,” became a full-on anthem. Why do you think it struck such a chord with women and girls?

CYNDI LAUPER: It was supposed to be! It would have been terrible if it didn’t. I heard it a certain way, and I wanted to make it a certain way. It had to be happy and joyful. I had to change a few things from the original [Robert Hazard version]; it had to be different. ‘Cause it was by a guy and a guy’s not gonna sing it how a girl does....

And there was this snare sound that was really big at the time that I thought was really great and I wanted to mix electronic with something more organic and [producer] Rick [Chertoff] was into that too at the time but didn’t want to go all electronic so we did this mix and created this thing, *THIS THING*, and it worked!

You know, sometimes you try things and it’s genius and sometimes you’re like “What was I thinking?!”

[For “Girls,]” everyone worked hard on the different keys, the different ideas--trumpeting this idea of all girls and all women. That was the idea behind the video for it too. I wanted every kind of girl in that video; my mother was in that video. I wanted everyone to be like “WOW! I want to hang with them!”...

You know, when you climb to the top of the mountain, you better have something good to say.

So, yeah, [at the time], make a girl’s anthem? Okay! We’re on! I was obsessing [on it] till I got it right.

LOC: What was the origin, the inspiration behind, “Time After Time”?

CL: That was a song I wrote with Rob [Hyman], sitting around writing with him. When I write with someone I like, I can really talk to them. If they aren't such a strict [writing] partner, when you can relax as a team, you can talk about things that are important to them and to me. And I just write everything down and then put it together.

I had this title— And we were jamming. I just go into a trance sometimes, write it all down and then take the best bits. With Rob, we could do that, we were close. And “Time” was the last thing we wrote for the album.

So I had this title—“Time After Time”—I took it from a “TV Guide,” a title of movie! I didn't really plan to use it, I was going to find another title eventually and I thought, I'll just use it for now. Then I couldn't take it out. Every time I tried to change it, it sounded weird.

I hadn't finished the lyrics and then I kept thinking “I hope this is it...” then, at one point... it felt like a hand was on my shoulder, it was a really spiritual thing, and I just stopped and wrote: “*If you fall, I will catch you...*”

[The song] just happened. Rob was breaking up with someone, that was part of it. The “*Lying in my bed, I hear the clock...*” was about this clock that I got for my birthday. And one day my boyfriend (and manager) at the time, pushed it over and smashed it to bits. He was like, “I'll get you another one.”

And he did—it was this ugly, loud as hell clock FROM HIS MOTHER'S HOUSE, that should have told me something right there. It was so loud at night I eventually put it in the bathroom behind the shower curtain and I could still hear it! So that's the “*Lying in my bed...*” That's where that came from.

Rick then had this watch that was going backwards. He was like “Hey, look at my watch! The hands are unwinding!” That's where “*The second hand unwinds...*” came from.

I take things from real people and write them down.

LOC: One of the songs on the album—in fact, one of the singles—was “She Bop.” It is on a topic that is usually not talked about in most pop songs. Did you ever get any pushback about having it on the album or putting it out as a single?

CL: No, cause it's fun. It was about having a Catholic background and that whole saying “Don't do that, you'll go blind!” It was supposed to be funny. But it didn't cause any trouble—I didn't mention anything! It's like when I was a kid listening to the Rolling Stones songs, I didn't know the meanings, the grown-ups did, but the kids didn't. It was two different audiences. Plus, “She Bop” was meant to be funny and it was funny.

LOC: One of the great tracks on the album is Prince's “When You Were Mine”? Had you heard his version of it from his album?

CL: Oh, yes, that's where I heard it! I knew I couldn't sing it like him. He was a very inspirational character, even from a young age, and he worked like how I like to work: go in the studio and just work it out. You invent. My favorite way now is to go in and take one more person with you who really understands your English so I can explain what I mean and what I want and they can get it.

LOC: Did you ever hear from Prince about it?

CL: He liked it. He saw what I tried to do with it.

He was *very* bright. And he had a great understanding of the business. I really liked him. A genius. A maverick. I miss him. You always were wondering what he was going to do next, the next turn he was going to take. I always admired him.

LOC: I had read once that you were frustrated that, on the album, you weren't better represented as a songwriter. Is that true?

CL: Originally, I was just hired as a vocalist to work with Rick. He had all of these songs [for me] and I was like "Holy cow! What is this? I won't do this, these stupid songs." They were just really....not for me.

And they hated my songs! Later on I will be able to write, this is the last song ["Time After Time"] and I got "Witness" on there. I wasn't so strict [at first] but after a while I became very strict and I told them what I would sing and wouldn't sing. "I'm not singing that piece of sh--!" (Oh, I'm probably shouldn't say the "S" word.)

[LOC: It's okay.]

I really fought to do what I wanted to do. Rob and Eric [Bazilian] were great but I want people to collaborate with. You have to have discussions. Rick had some songs but then I was like, "They're not as good as 'Time After Time.'" Just not as good.

LOC: Why do you think "Time After Time" has so connected with people and become such a standard?

CL: I don't know. Honestly, I don't know.

But I'm glad it did because its success enabled me to say, "Why don't you let me write more?" And they were still like "Yeah, yeah, whatever."

My second album, they were still like, "You can't sing this..." But I don't work like that. I had to make a sound that was unique.

I was disheartened; it was "Do this! Do that!" Not good.

But I finally said, it's my name on the front. I get it, if your name is on the front in big letters and not little letters on the back...But who the heck are you? I was probably a nightmare at that time. But I had been in [the band] Blue Angel. I saw it hit the dust. I knew how to do things.

You know I fought hard for "Girls" to be the first single. They wanted "Time After Time" as the first but you have to lead with an up-tempo and then go to the ballad.

Well, Polydor, at that time, wanted me to be Barbra Streisand! I mean I love Barbra but I don't want to be her; I want to be me!

I had another manager—who I can't say—who wanted me to do this song because Debbie Harry wouldn't do it and then he wanted me to sing it like her! I said, "I ain't doin' that! I like her but that sucks!" You can't become someone as a sound-alike. In what ways does that prove your courage? You have to have the courage to create something...be different.

I really stood up for myself. No one was used to that. I was this “uppity woman.” On my videos, I’d be painting the furniture on the sets because I wanted them to look a certain way! And sometimes people were just like “Shut up and sing...” But I didn’t want to be lead around by the nose by some Svengali. I was my own Svengali!