

**How's the tour going?**

Wicked. I'm having such a laugh. I'm shocked. The last time I did theatre was 20 years ago in Mama I Want To Sing in the West End. It was my first time doing theatre. Maybe I wasn't ready for it. It felt monotonous. It was based on gospel, so maybe it was too close to home. I didn't really like it but maybe I've grown up because I'm loving this. It's the music of Elvis Presley but the story is about all different types of love. It's got a great script, fantastic cast, it's just a joy to do.

**Were you an Elvis fan before?**

My mother was obsessed with Elvis. I was about seven when he



died and I remember my mum wailing and saying, 'Elvis is dead'. She was really losing it. She's thrilled I'm doing this. It's like nothing else I've done in my career before has mattered.

**You started your career as a teenager - were you mentally prepared for it?**

I started singing in church when I was eight, won my first award when I was 11 at a Pentecostal church convention in Wembley, did

a couple of TV shows when I was 15 and people started saying, 'Who is that skinny girl with the big voice?' I was really skinny back then - people called me Boney M. Then I started doing backing vocals with Shakatak and got a record deal at 17. I remember going into Island Records. Bono was walking out of the office, Grace Jones was in the restaurant, it was all kicking off. I thought, 'This is where I want to be'.

**What were the pitfalls of becoming famous at 17?**

I was on a mission to prove that us Brits can sing as well as the Americans. I was crazy, thinking, 'We've got to prove the Brits have got it.' I was flying all over the world, toured America twice, it was like a dream. The only thing that stopped me going mental was my grandparents. They expected me to go crazy and I wanted to prove it wasn't going to happen because I could always hear my grandad saying, 'The music industry is sin and degradation.' It worked.

**'The music business has been in agony for years but I think it will resolve and end up being better for the artists'**

**You've said fame made you paranoid - is being famous all it's cracked up to be?**

Fame is a psychosis. It's not a natural state for people to be in. Thank God I'm British because we keep it real here. If you start believing you're a supersonic being it messes your head up. You've got to look at it as a job. You shut it out when you come home. Having a good family keeps you real, too. One time I was on telly and my mum told me off because I hadn't put my eyelashes on.

**What's been your biggest diva moment?**

When it all first kicked off someone from the record company said I had to put the career first and not the family. He said: 'You're public property now.' So when my family asked me to do something and I said, 'Look, I can't do it, I'm public property now,' they all came down on me like a ton of bricks. 'Who do you think you are? Just because you sold some records...' I wasn't allowed to get up myself.

**Your last album came out in 2009 - any plans for a new one?**

I'm not one for conveyor belts and shoving albums out there. I did an album three years ago that we didn't release. I'm working on new stuff now.



REX

I've done some songs with Don Black, who is a genius. He wrote Diamonds Are Forever, he's incredible. I'm not sure how that'll be coming out - there are so many ways to get your music out there now for an artist. The music business has been in agony for years but I think it will resolve and end up being better for the artists. It's great that it's gone back to being about live shows.

**What lessons has your career in showbiz taught you?**

Patience. And to have total belief in your gift. You have to remember you're here to give your gift to people - and it's not about being popular all the time.



**Wise man:** Grateful Dead's Jerry Garcia

I remember the Grateful Dead's Jerry Garcia saying: 'If you stick around long enough you get hip again.' You don't always need to be in the public eye. It's not all about celebrity - this idea

that if you're not on TV every two minutes you're dead. We do this so people can pick up a piece of music and feel great when they put it on - and that's what it's always been about.

ANDREW WILLIAMS

Love Me Tender is at the New Wimbledon Theatre until June 27 and tours nationally until September. [lovemetendermusical.com](http://lovemetendermusical.com)

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