"I never wanted to be a singer or be in the music business - I wanted to be a flight attendant so I could travel the world for free." So says GWEN DICKEY and it's a surprising admission given that the super-talented and magnetic Mississippi-born singer - who fronted soul-funk aggregation Rose Royce between 1976 and 1980 - was the voice that shined brightly on the group's memorable Norman Whitfield-produced international hits 'Car Wash,' 'Wishing On A Star,' 'Love Don't Live Here Anymore' (the latter song was also covered by Madonna, Faith Evans and Beyonce) and 'Is It Love You're After.' Touring with Rose Royce, Gwen fulfilled her wish to travel and see the world but the pressures of stardom caused her to quit the group after the band's fourth album, 1979's 'Rose Royce IV: Rainbow Connection.' Initially reluctant to return to the music business, in the '80s Gwen slowly began rebuilding her career as a singer with a series of soulful, dance-oriented singles.

Today, in 2015, Gwen is still in demand as a performer, particularly in the UK, where she's been a popular live attraction for many years. On Sunday 15th November, Gwen appears on the bill of the keenly anticipated 'Great Voices Of Soul' concert at Wembley's SSE Arena and ahead of the gig, she talked to SJF's Charles Waring about her music, career, and, of course, her time as a member of the influential Rose Royce...
your house there are people hanging outside waiting to take your picture for a magazine or a newspaper and you had to be careful who you were talking to because you could be talking to people who are hiding from the press, I know exactly how they feel.

What was the experience of being an instant star like?

Yes, overnight. That film probably changed your life instantly, didn’t it? Somebody but because they really wanted Norman in the end they agreed for him to do it with us. Nobody was watching the film and the producers and the director were going crazy and trying to put this on the backburner and you guys are going to do the new movie music.” Of course, there they wanted him to use the Temptations or a group of that calibre and we had already recorded stuff like that, you know, because I never wanted to be a singer. I never wanted to be in the music business - I wanted to be a flight attendant so I travel the world for free. That was what I said I told you that you were going to be rich and famous (laughs). But you never think about the premiere... once it was playing on the radio and we were at the premiere, when they started was a big hoo-hah about that because MCA didn’t want an unknown group to do the music for a movie they wanted to do. The album that really launched Rose Royce was the ‘Car Wash’ soundtrack. What do you think I don’t think so. Unless they’re on one stage and I’m on another (laughs). There’s no chance of a reunion then? I think I can feel the fire coming from them as we speak (laughs).

Did people assume that you were the Rose part of Rose Royce?

Royce.” His partner was called Walter so from Norman and Walter I came up with the name Rose Norwalt. “people want to know what your surname is as you keep telling them that you’re not Rose, you’re Gwen not Rose. He said “from now on the world will know you as Rose” and I guess the world upset when you’re rich and famous.” I said she’s not going to care about that, she named me up. Yeah. Norman sat us down one day and said I’m going to change the name of this group: from the group is called Rose Royce. We said: you’re going to name us after a car? He said: ‘Car Wash’ and we were at the set every day because Norman had to go and see what was happening and then go home and write the music. But when we did ‘Car Wash’ and we were at us. We used to go on the set every day because Norman had to go and see what was happening and then go home and write the music. But when we did ‘Car Wash’ and we were at the set every day because Norman had to go and see what was happening and then go home and write the music. But when we did ‘Car Wash’ and we were at the set every day because Norman had to go and see what was happening and then go home and write the music. But when we did ‘Car Wash’ and we were at the set every day because Norman had to go and see what was happening and then go home and write the music.

How did the band feel when people started thinking that you were actually Rose Royce?

Because they’re classics and they’re timeless. Look how long ago the songs were recorded and when they recorded back in the late seventies. But I’m very happy. In the states, people, of course, those songs you mentioned there, ‘Car Wash,’ and ‘Wishing On A Star’ - do you ever get so how do British audiences compare with ones in the USA? You’ve had a long association with the British people and you’re very popular over here very exciting. Whispers and Patti LaBelle. I’ve done shows with the SOS Band, Soul II Soul and Loose Ends. In terms of the other people on the bill, have you performed with any of them before in concert? You will hear all the hits and all the classics that the people want to hear: ‘Car Wash,’ ‘Wishing On A Star,’ I never would expect that people would be so enthusiastic about these songs even today when they recorded back in the late seventies. But I’m very happy. In the states, people, of course, those songs you mentioned there, ‘Car Wash,’ and ‘Wishing On A Star’ - do you ever get..."
what she told him and again, he was in the studio with Norman. He called her a couple times
much. You had to stay in the studio with Norman for twenty-four hours and you don't come home
I was just a mess because I had spent five years with these guys and they had made me enemy
and somehow he would always manage to get it out of you, strange as that sounds. If he heard
and somehow he would always manage to get it out of you, strange as that sounds. If he heard
Anymore' was one of the last songs that I recorded with the group so I knew after that album
Disappeared. And Norman put up a ten thousand dollar reward for whoever could find me and
another person and if you didn't even go home. You had to stay in the studio with Norman for
So what were you doing during that period when you laid low?
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No, there was no other way to do it. If you couldn't sing that song, you weren't going to
3 / 5
But you ended up seeing in this group called the Jewels, is that right? minister and he would go to different places. They had a thing in America called a revival, where Yes, but that was just a bit of fun. That was how I discovered because we were a local band, both vocally and with the acting - so I have a lot of respect the people who work in the theatre.

I wasn't really into music. I used to travelling around the States with my father so I knew that I liked travelling.

My ambition was get away from my mother and be grown (laughs). I wanted to travel because I

I really like Dubai and I like Japan.

What about unfulfilled ambitions. Have you got any more projects on the horizon?

There's so many. Just meeting so many different people - not just famous people - from around

Perhaps next year. I have a couple of songs that have been sent to me so I'm thinking about
to do it in person with your own eyes. It's just a great experience.

Did you come from a musical family?

My father and all of his brothers and sisters were great singers. My father had a gospel group

What do you remember about recording a version of 'Wishing On A Star' with rapper

You say you like travelling: do you have any favourite places that you like to go to?

Saturdays you do two shows a day. You're doing Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday,

I really was so excited. Oh my God, that's me! (Laughs).

So when you at high school, then, what was your ambition?

Did you feel that you were an outsider when you first join the band, because they had

You made quite a few singles in the '80s and '90s, such as 'Don't Stop.' Would you like to

to people like Gladys Knight and Aretha Franklin, the Temptations and Marvin Gaye. I knew the

What's been the highlight of your career to date?

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Were there any singers that you admired and liked?

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