"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...
I found it quite stressful really because I wasn't used to the fact that every time you walk out of going out with a friend to have a burger or something you could end up with a picture of yourself someone like yourself and you didn't know what you said could be printed. Even when you were and reserved, it was very stressful. I don't think I handled it very well (laughs). So those people your house there are people hanging outside waiting to take your picture for a magazine or a on the front page with your mouth open trying to eat a burger. For me, because I was so young

What was the experience of being an instant star like?

Yes, overnight.

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 premiere... once it was playing on the radio and we were at the premiere, when they started release the first single from that album but when he got offered the film he said "we're going to put this on the backburner and you guys are going to do the new movie music." Of course, there wanted to do.

First of all when MCA came to Norman Whitfield and wanted him to do the music for the film remember about recording that album and attending the movie premiere?

The album that really launched Rose Royce was the 'Car Wash' soundtrack. What do you

I don't think so. Unless they're on one stage and I'm on another (laughs).

I think I can feel the fire coming from them as we speak (laughs).

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

Rose Norwalt.

and the press knew that I was called Rose. Even today when some people see me they go "hey, Miss Rose Royce," and I go hi. Then I had to come up with a surname. Norman said Royce." His partner was called Walter so from Norman and Walter I came up with the name "people want to know what your surname is as you keep telling them that you're not Rose elegance and class." Then he looked at me and said "from now on your going to be known as Rose." I said my mother is going to be so upset and he said "your mother is not going to care about that, she named me Gwen not Rose. He said "from now on the world will know you as Rose" and I guess the world knows me as Rose (laughs).

Yeah. Norman sat us down one day and said I'm going to change the name of this group: from you want me to do it I'm going to use this band, if not the you need to call Quincy Jones or

Evelyn. She had just gotten married and they had been touring a lot and she and her husband wanted to start a family. It was going to be her last tour and they tried to find a female to replace her. They had performed in Miami and came to this club where we were performing and when Joe saw me he said "that's the girl I want to replace... " I can't remember her name.

Who actually discovered you?

Fate, really, because I was living in Miami and I was singing in a local club in a house band and I got discovered. The next thing I know, I was flown to LA and I met the late Norman Whitfield with the late Edwin Starr as his band and Norman Whitfield would also use them when he would go into the studio to record albums on the Temptations. So he was about to form them as a band and when Joe saw me he said "that's her right there." But when I went out to LA, Norman Whitfield had other plans. He

Going right back to the beginning, what circumstances led you to become a part of Rose Royce?

Because they're classics and they're timeless. Look how long ago the songs were recorded and that time who had recently gotten married and they had been touring a lot and she and her husband wanted to start a family. It was going to be her last tour and they tried to find a female to replace her. They had performed in Miami and came to this club where we were performing and when Joe saw me he said "that's the girl I want to replace... " I can't remember her name.

What is it, then, that makes those songs so special?

No, I don't.

Those songs you mentioned there, 'Car Wash,' and 'Wishing On A Star' - do you ever get tired of singing them?

Star,' I never would expect that people would be so enthusiastic about these songs even today that they send my way sometimes when I'm singing makes me cry (laughs). I think oh my God, here (in the UK). But still, they give you love.

You've had a long association with the British people and you're very popular over here so how do British audiences compare with ones in the USA?

No, I haven't and that will be very exciting for me to be able to perform with people like The (all of who also appear at Wembley) before but never with Patti LaBelle and The Whispers. It's very exciting.

You're due to perform at the Great Voices of Soul concerts coming up in November at
what she told him and again, he was in the studio with Norman. He called her a couple times

So what were you doing during that period when you laid low?

don't want to hear the song" so she told him: “the next time you go to the studio and you stay in

who was in the music business. He said okay and so I guess a couple of weeks later he forgot

life anew.

were his clothes still hanging in the wardrobe and his guitar was in the corner and he said he sat

I didn't tell them. I finished the album, barely made it through the last tour and when the tour

Don't Live Here Any More.' Is there a story behind it and how it came to be recorded?

come to the studio with an overnight bag because you didn't know when you were going to get

because I've had enough of this.” Not everybody could handle being the partner of somebody

there for twenty-four hours and you don't come home I won't be here when you come back

Whitfield and he and his wife had had an massive argument. She was saying “you haven't been

down and he wrote 'Love Don't Live Here Any More' in tears. When he told me the story I felt

the fact that I was singing all the songs. They would come and tell me but they wouldn't say

How did you break the news to the band?

Another classic song that is associated with you and your time in Rose Royce is 'Love

Anymore' was one of the last songs that I recorded with the group so I knew after that album

would keep us there for three or four days at a time without us even going home. You had to

flash

and that tour I knew that I was going to be gone. I hadn't said it to anyone but that's why I was

so I was hanging out in an apartment that I had rented and eating and crying. I was very young

Miles Gregory went home one day after being in the studio twenty-four hours with Norman

number one because they weren't happy but they wouldn't tell Norman things. They didn't like

kind of upset when I sang it in the studio.

So Billie came over to Norman's studio, in tears of course, saying Barbra Streisand wasn't going

all, 'Wishing On A Star' wasn't written for Rose Royce. It was written for Barbra Streisand. At

Biloxi, Mississippi, and I wasn't really familiar with ‘oh, this is going to be a hit.’ Those are words

I never thought of them as hits. You have to understand that I came from a small town called

than Barbra Streisand anyway.” I said what? Are you kidding me? And of course, the rest is

for whatever reason she decided she had enough songs and wasn't going to have 'Wishing On A

to record her song and Norman said, “I don't know why you're crying: Gwen can sing it better

he would just let me go and I'd go in and what you hear today is what came out.

He was a perfectionist - a tyrant. You had to give him exactly what he was feeling in his head

and somehow he would always manage to get it out of you, strange as that sounds. If he heard

wanted to hear in his head. I guess it worked because the proof is in the pudding; all these

songs that he produced and wrote we're still talking about today and I'm still going out and

Going back to the music, the late Norman Whitfield was a genius in the studio - what was

he like to work with?

(\[Image\])
GWEN DICKEY WILL BE PERFORMING AT THE GREAT VOICES OF SOUL CONCERT AT WEMBLEY'S SSE ARENA ON NOVEMBER 15TH 2015