



Tina Turner
(b. Anna Mae
Bullock) in 1984

PERFORMER

TINA TURNER

AFTER DECADES AS A PERFORMER, SHE BECAME
ONE OF THE BIGGEST SUPERSTARS OF THE 1980s.

BY BRITTANY SPANOS

Tina Turner is the queen of rock & roll. There's no disputing that. Her flashy performance style (That fringe! Those legs! The wigs!) has inspired generations of rock and pop stars, ranging from Mick Jagger to Beyoncé. Her voice is in a class of its own, molten with swagger and emotion. Her influence is still reaching the further depths of music, having expanded the once-limited idea of how a Black woman could conquer a stage and be both a powerhouse and a multidimensional being.

Born Anna Mae Bullock on November 26, 1939, in Brownsville, Tennessee, the rock & roller led a life that was anything but easy before she eventually pursued a solo career. She was a fighter, a choice that was made for her. Her father was abusive, and her mother ran away from the family, leaving Bullock and her sisters to fend for themselves. As a teen, she found solace in St. Louis nightclubs, which soon put her in Ike Turner's orbit. She joined his Kings of Rhythm in 1957, and within a few years Bullock was renamed Tina Turner. As a married couple, they became the Ike & Tina Turner Revue.

The pair's success was remarkable but ultimately short-lived, and Ike made Tina a prisoner in her home. At a time when domestic violence wasn't even a term people used to describe the all-too-common type of abuse Tina faced, she bravely escaped with nothing but the name he gave her. It was hers now, and she would make history with it.

Turner's early solo career had a slow start. Her first two albums, *Tina Turns the Country On!* (1974) and *Acid Queen* (1975), were released while she was still with the Revue and had her performing country and rock covers by the likes of Kris Kristofferson, Dolly Parton, the Rolling Stones, and the Who. She would release two more albums in the seventies, post-divorce, but found it

difficult to gain momentum.

Turner had been a stage star throughout the sixties, living on a grueling touring schedule with the Revue, so she went back to what she knew best. In Las Vegas, she headlined her own cabaret show. She became a TV personality, appearing on *Hollywood Squares* and *The Sonny and Cher Show*. Her performances caught the attention of famed manager Roger Davies, who took her on as a client and helped audiences see her as a solo star. Davies booked Turner gigs in New York City club the Ritz, attended by Rod Stewart, members of the Stones, and David Bowie. The adoration of rock stars whose own careers had been heavily influenced by Turner helped prompt a resurgence: She went on *Saturday Night Live* to perform "Hot Legs" with Stewart and opened for the Stones on their 1981 tour in support of *Tattoo You*.

But the world had long given up on and nearly forgotten about Turner, so she and Davies had to fight for her to be seen as a viable act worth signing. A Black single mother in her 40s, without a hit in over a decade, she was scoffed at and over-scrutinized by white label executives unwilling to bet on an artist who seemed well past her prime. Some openly referred to her with racial slurs.

Thanks to A&R person John Carter, Capitol took a chance. In 1983, Turner flew to London to work with a slew of producers and make the rock album she envisioned. The label pushed back against her choice of musical style, but Turner and her few allies persisted. In London, producers like Terry Britten offered songs the label worried didn't sound very "Tina Turner": too white, too pop, too two-dimensional. Turner wasn't entirely convinced at first either, but her uncanny ear and musical intuition were just as strong as she was. Leave it to her to transform those bland, poppy demos into something ferocious, leading to her massively successful solo



relaunch, *Private Dancer* (1984). Instead of the R&B sound she'd made with the Revue, Turner leaned into the rock music she worshipped and helped establish, as well as radio-friendly pop.

Songs like "What's Love Got to Do With It" and her cover of Al Green's "Let's Stay Together" made one thing clear: The world's stages were in desperate need of a star like her. She was powerful in all aspects of her persona, with a booming voice that teeters between sobering emotionality and raw debauchery and a magnetic stage presence visible from across the galaxy. She was a star reborn with a crucial story to tell, and the world was finally ready to hear it.

"No, I don't consider it a comeback album," Turner says in the 2021 HBO documentary *Tina*. "Tina had never arrived. It was Tina's debut for the first time, and this was my first album."

The eighties belonged to Turner. She embarked on a 177-date tour in support of the mega-selling album and nabbed a starring role alongside Mel Gibson in the blockbuster film *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome*. The film's soundtrack spawned two hits – "We Don't Need Another Hero (Thunderdome)" and "One of the Living" – and a Grammy win for Best Rock Vocal Performance, Female.

There was no sophomore slump for Turner's Capitol deal: In 1986, she returned with *Break Every Rule*, a crisp, even poppier project. The album spawned another hit with the cheeky and catchy "Typical Male" and hit Number Two on the *Billboard* Hot 100. A few years later came the album *Foreign Affair* (1989), which capped off the decade with Turner's version of Bonnie Tyler's "The Best." The song peaked at Number 15 and the album reached Number 31 but became a global hit and remains one of her bestselling, signature songs.

Along the way, Turner became more publicly frank



PREVIOUS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:
Onstage with Mick Jagger, 1975;
with Keith Richards, 1983;
cheek to cheek with David Bowie, 1985.
THIS PAGE: Live in '85:
Jones Beach Theater, New York.



“

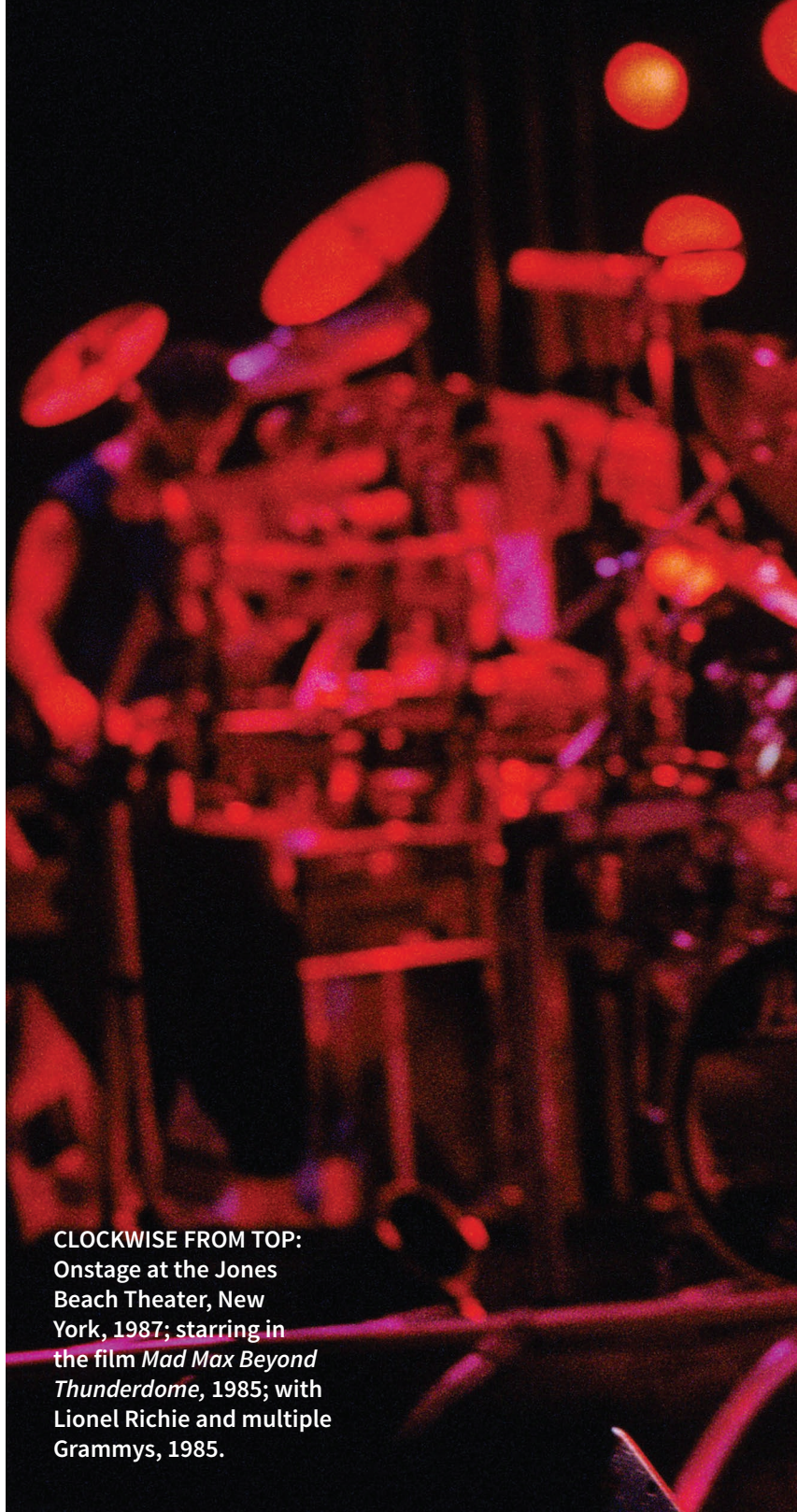
SHE WAS
A STAR
REBORN
WITH A
CRUCIAL
STORY TO
TELL, AND
THE WORLD
WAS FINALLY
READY TO
HEAR IT.

”

about her trauma and saw her courage not just celebrated but inspirational for the millions of people around the globe who also found themselves trapped in emotionally, physically abusive partnerships. She released the memoir *I, Tina* in 1986, cowritten with *Rolling Stone* journalist (and soon-to-be MTV News anchor) Kurt Loder. The book would be adapted seven years later into the biographical film *What's Love Got to Do With It*, starring Angela Bassett as Tina and Laurence Fishburne as Ike. For the soundtrack, Turner recorded new versions of songs from her days in the Revue: “Nutbush City Limits,” “Proud Mary,” and the Top Ten hit “I Don’t Wanna Fight.”

Through the nineties, Turner basked in the hard-earned appreciation of a woman who had been to hell and back. When she and Ike were inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in 1991, neither attended. She released two more albums but decided to retire from recording in 1999 with *Twenty Four Seven*. The trek in support of the album, billed as her final tour, was a barn burner that featured Lionel Richie and Joe Cocker as opening acts.

In 2005, Turner was recognized at the Kennedy Center Honors, which featured tributes to her by Melissa Etheridge, Queen Latifah, Beyoncé, and Al Green. In 2008, she came out of retirement to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of her career with *Tina!*, another compilation of her hits, and one of the best-selling tours of all time. Then she hung up her Bob Mackie costumes



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:
Onstage at the Jones
Beach Theater, New
York, 1987; starring in
the film *Mad Max Beyond
Thunderdome*, 1985; with
Lionel Richie and multiple
Grammys, 1985.





SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY



Acid Queen
1975 (United Artists)



Private Dancer
1984 (Capitol)



Break Every Rule
1986 (Capitol)



Foreign Affair
1989 (Capitol)



**What's Love Got to
Do With It**
1993 (Parlophone)



Twenty Four Seven
1999 (Parlophone)

THIS PAGE: Ready for her close-up, 1987.
OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:
Upstaging the Eiffel Tower, Paris, 1984; singing
with Adrienne Warren – who portrays Turner
in the Broadway musical *Tina* – at the opening
night curtain call, New York City, 2019; as a
Kennedy Center honoree, with Tony Bennett,
Robert Redford, Julie Harris, and Suzanne Farrell
(clockwise from top left), 2005.





for good. “I was just tired of singing and making everybody happy,” she told the *New York Times* in 2019. “That’s all I’d ever done in my life.”

Turner’s story is one of the most powerful in music history, defying more odds than even she had anticipated facing. Of course, it continues to be told – passing on the knowledge of how remarkable she still is – in the stage musical *Tina*, which opened in London in April 2018 and on Broadway a year later. Turner’s appearance at the show’s opening night in New York City was said to be a goodbye to her American fans. Her post-retirement life has been quiet, happy, and full of love. She’s been settled down with German music executive Erwin Bach since

1986; the pair married in 2013.

Bach and Turner live in Switzerland together, and a small portion of their love and life was chronicled in her 2018 memoir, *My Love Story*, as well as in the recent *Tina* documentary. Both reclaim the life she started in her 40s, one that was free and full of worthy compassion.

“I don’t necessarily want to be a ‘strong’ person. I had a terrible life. I just kept going. You just keep going, and you hope that something will come,” she said to the *New York Times*, gesturing to the home she’s built with Bach. “This came.”

And tonight comes her induction – for the second time – into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame.