

Tony Mitchell

Memorializing Dusty Springfield: Millennial Mourning, Whiteness, Fandom, and the Seductive Voice

Dusty, Diana, Global Mourning, and Memorable Millennial Events

In her introduction to a volume of Australian academic responses to the death of Lady Diana Spencer, *Planet Diana: Cultural Studies and Global Mourning* (1997), Helen Grace mobilizes Zoe Sofoulis's use of the term "global mourning" to encapsulate the huge outpouring of international public emotion and symbolic expression that accompanied Princess Diana's funeral. The extraordinary degree of emotion generated, she argues, evoked

another world of affects and performances, a world that is far from the jaded world of postmodernity, where affect has waned and irony has triumphed.... this space of emotion is relegated to fiction, it is the devalued sphere of women's novels, of soap operas and believing audiences, a space which offers a safe refuge from the "real" world. (1997:1, 4)

Grace might also have bridged a significant gap in this extensive and diverse memorial to the princess from a former outpost of the British empire by evoking the equally imaginary and affective (and frequently female-centred) fictional space of pop fandom.

This sphere had already been appropriated into Diana's world of "secular sainthood" (Burchill 1998:122) by Julie Burchill in her 1992 essay "Di Hard: The Pop Princess," which she shamelessly recycled at strategic points throughout her 1998 obituary-biog-

raphy *Diana*. It was in "Di Hard" that this abrasively iconoclastic Diana acolyte and former *wunderkind* music journalist coined the term "people's princess" and, perhaps more significantly, dubbed Diana "the first royal icon raised on and sustained by Pop culture" (1992:237). Burchill compared the Princess to Madonna "crossed with Mother Teresa" (243) and mapped the stages in her rising celebrity in terms of a progression from pop fan (mixing with ordinary people) to pop star (mixing with other celebrities) to pop Svengali, "managing the press; unequalled by anyone, let alone clod-hopping *ingenues* like Madonna and Prince" (1998:240–41). Burchill's prophetic conclusion (for 1992) to "Di Hard" declared that "Diana has lived a pop star's life, but would never die a pop star's death. *Breeding, you see*" (1992:242).

But her framing of the princess in pop parameters signals both the overwhelmingly affective and imaginary role that pop fandom plays in British public and private life and how its values and attributes impinge on other spheres of media celebrity. Pop and royalty offer the fan parallel imaginary worlds. But the largest claim Burchill makes in her highly Anglocentric memorializing of Diana is that as a major global millennial event, the princess's funeral eclipsed both the assassination of Kennedy and Armstrong's moonwalk, and "at last this sad, shimmering century had an image that was worthy of it" (1998:231). Given the extensiveness of the "global mourning" which the princess's death evoked, Burchill's elevation of it to the status of a major millennial memorial event has some credibility. And as Felicity Meakins (1998) has suggested, the global media played a major role in this official public memorialization of Diana by re-sanitizing her image after her death and remaking her as a secular saint.

Similarly spontaneous global outpourings of grief, albeit on a much smaller scale, came as a response to the news of the death on March 2, 1999 of British pop icon Dusty Springfield from breast cancer at the age of 59. The date had "royal" associations as it was the day Springfield was due to collect her Order of the British Empire medal from the Queen. But this was hardly a "pop star's death," either, despite the depths of abjection Springfield had reached in the 1980s through alcohol, drugs, depression, self-mutilation, and suicide attempts. Unlike the re-sanitization of Diana, Springfield's authorized biographers, sixties music journalist Penny Valentine, and former Springfield manager Vicki Wickham, melodramatically set about revealing the extent to which she was prone to repeated self-mutilation during her self-imposed exile in the United States in the 1970s and 1980s.

One key link between Springfield's death, an undisputedly major millennial event in the British pop music sphere, and the princess's was the cherubic, heraldic figure of Sir Elton John, who "memorialized" the saint-like Diana as an "English rose" (Davis 1997:93) at her funeral, singing a revamped version of his memorial ode to Marilyn Monroe, "Candle in the Wind," which subsequently became the biggest ever international number one hit. This not only substantially reaffirmed Diana's pop star, showbiz, and gay iconic qualities, but as Karen Brooks points out, also spawned a joke about her fall from royal favour: "Why did Elton John sing at the funeral? Because he's the only queen who cares" (1997:142). His mourner-jester-confidant role for Diana was complemented in the Dusty Springfield legend by his dedicating Springfield's song "I Only Want to be with You" to her at a concert in Illinois after news of her death was

announced. (An aptly memorial historical choice for British pop music, given that it was the first song ever to be featured on the still-surviving BBC TV music program *Top of the Pops*, on New Years' Day in 1964.) His MC role was augmented by his formally standing in for Springfield's induction into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in New York twelve days later, where he memorialized her as "the greatest white singer there has ever been." John catalyzed the royalty-by-association between the affective and imaginary worlds of the pop singer and the princess.

John's qualification of Springfield's status with the word "white" suggests, as with his obituary to Diana, an assertion of an essentialized postcolonial Britishness, but it also tacitly acknowledges the prior rights to soul music of African American singers, and that Dusty Springfield was sometimes mistaken for one. Her biographer, Lucy O'Brien, has pointed out the irony of her being used as an icon of "a white woman expressing a white culture" by the racist British Movement's fanzine *Vanguard* in 1989, especially given her strong anti-apartheid stance on her tour of South Africa in 1964 (1999:67). Other sobriquets which Dusty accumulated during her career that emphasized her crossover style of singing included "the White Queen of Soul," "the queen of blue-eyed soul," and even "the white negress," an expression used by Sir Cliff Richard, another quintessentially British pop star with royal aspirations, in 1965 (O'Brien 1999:61). This need for reminders of whiteness, far from normative in the field of soul music, also serves as a reminder of both the African American origins of pop music and the problematizing of whiteness. In her essay "Representing Whiteness," bell hooks quotes Coco Fusco's essay "Fantasies of Oppositionality":

Racial identities are not only black, Latino, Asian, Native American, and so on; they are also white. To ignore white ethnicity is to redouble its hegemony by naturalising it. Without specifically addressing white ethnicity, there can be no critical evaluation of the construction of the other. (hooks 1990:171)

It could be argued that Dusty Springfield was one of a plethora of artists who followed Elvis Presley's example in appropriating the repertoire of African American singers. Songs she sang were also performed by Dionne Warwick and Aretha Franklin, among others, although these songs were invariably written by white composers. Where she differs substantially from Elvis is in being remembered for attempting to return the favour and promote her black sisters (and brothers) in the UK, as well as in refusing to perform to segregated white audiences in South Africa in 1964. Consequently, despite the exaggerated whiteness of her blonde, backcombed beehive hairdos (a virtual camp parody of the black Motown girl groups), she became a highly creolized figure in Anglo-American pop. Here again are parallels with Diana, whom Mica Nava has described as a "Princess of Others" (1997:19), as her funeral very noticeably attracted mourners from all races (and sexual preferences). Nava argues that despite her very white English complexion and appearance, Diana had an "ability to speak to and recruit into her orbit those groups who considered themselves marginalised from the more orthodox political processes" (20).

Dusty Springfield also attracted legions of black and "marginalized" (especially gay) fans and supporters. In addition, she appropriated the repertoire of European "others,"

recording authoritative English (and some Italian) versions of songs by European composers such as Jacques Brel (as did her cult Anglo-American label-mate Scott Walker), Charles Aznavour, and Pino Donaggio, and performed versions of her own hits in German, Italian, French, and Spanish. According to Valentine and Wickham, Springfield's border-crossing cosmopolitanism (she was also interested in Portuguese fado) particularly endeared her to the gay community: "They loved her for being cosmopolitan and exotic, for recording singles in Italian and French over the years, for knowing about Brazilian music before it was fashionable and for being well travelled, as much as for her 'over-the-top' looks (2000:197).

This "exoticism" (a word Elton John uses to describe her in the liner notes of the memorial four-CD compilation *Simply Dusty*) constitutes a major component of her gay iconic status. Carole Pope's memoir adds another "exotic" observation: "she told me that when she was tarted up, she felt like a Puerto Rican drag queen" (2000a). Springfield also became an ideal figure for transvestite entertainers to impersonate, with her beehive hairstyle, "panda" makeup, exaggerated Motown-styled hand mannerisms, and glittering gowns.

Despite the added "otherness" of her Irish Catholic upbringing, Springfield's death also memorialized Britain's brief global ascendancy in pop music in the 1960s. Her very English provincial funeral took place at the church of St. Mary the Virgin in Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire, a village described by Valentine and Wickham as "middle England at its finest and bleached white" (2000:291). They also seized the opportunity for comparison to that "other" major millennial event: "For a moment it brought back pictures of that other funeral only rather more than a year before. There was the same expression on these faces: as though someone they had known with enormous intimacy had died. And in a way, like Diana, they had and they hadn't" (292).

Springfield had her own brushes with royalty, with the Queen even sending a message to say she was "deeply saddened" by the singer's death. Springfield's encounter with Princess Margaret at a charity concert at the Albert Hall in 1979 was also memorable, when, after a comment by the singer on her noticeably gay audience that "It's nice to see all the royalty isn't confined to the box," she was snubbed by the princess and later requested to sign a formal letter of apology for insulting the Queen (O'Brien 1999:165-66). This matches Lady Diana's reported claim (in *Gay Times*) to have quipped on one ceremonial occasion "You'd better call me Diana.... because I'm only a princess and everyone else in the room is a queen" (Benzie 1997:129). There are further parallels with Springfield in Benzie's study of Diana as gay icon: Diana's "dowdy and somewhat embarrassing beginnings" mirror Dusty's as "an awful fat, ugly middle-class kid." Similarly, while Diana "had in some way performed 'coming out'" (130) in her *Panorama* television interview in 1995, Springfield performed hers in a London *Evening Standard* interview in 1970 when she admitted to being bisexual (O'Brien 1999:136-37). If Lady Di was "an outcast, it seems, who has become a desirable, and eminently recuperable, icon" (Benzie 1997:131) in the gay world, Springfield's career went through a parallel process of recuperation as a gay icon courtesy of the Pet Shop Boys in 1987. In an obituary of Springfield in *The Guardian*, Richard Williams regarded the Pet Shop Boys recuperation of her career as nothing short of an exhumation: "Thanks to Tennant and

Lowe, the public had been reminded of her existence as something more than a ghost from the 1960s”(1999:18).

Dusty in “Official” Pop History

Prior to her death, Springfield’s position in canonic histories of pop music was confined to one biography (that by Lucy O’Brien, which first appeared in 1988) and a series of vignettes acknowledging her status as the most prominent and proficient of the handful of “girl singers” among the 1960s “British Invasion.” She is mostly remembered for her string of transatlantic hits between 1962 and 1969 rather than for her formative years with the “girl group” trio the Lana Sisters from 1958 to 1960 and then with the folk group the Springfields, which included her brother Tom. Her career peaked with her 1969 US album *Dusty in Memphis*, which sold poorly but later became a cult success, particularly for the transatlantic hit “Son of a Preacher Man,” later recorded by Aretha Franklin. A discreet gap follows until her career revival in the UK in 1987 with the Pet Shop Boys. She rates just over one column in Phil Hardy and Dave Laing’s reliable and comprehensive 1990 *Faber Companion to 20th-Century Popular Music* (the same as Dionne Warwick, compared to two-and-a-half columns for Aretha Franklin). Hardy and Laing note her unparalleled use of R & B and soul models in Britain, her exclusion from mainstream rock in the 1970s, and the “lesser works” she recorded up until 1987.

Springfield’s initial transatlantic success, and her reputation for being “difficult” in insisting on maintaining some artistic control over the musical production of her performances and recordings, meant she rated inclusion in some feminist histories of women in popular music. But UK journalists Sue Steward and Sheryl Garratt (a Burchill cohort) give her short shrift in their 1984 post-punk survey of women in rock music, *Signed, Sealed and Delivered*. More interested in politically assertive and independent feminist rock icons of the 1970s and 1980s, they offer only perfunctory acknowledgement of Dusty’s professionalism before consigning her to a Motown-derivative oblivion along with her less vocally able 1960s peers Lulu, Sandie Shaw, and Cilla Black:

Unlike these clearly ordinary girls who’d had a lucky break, Dusty Springfield already had a career behind her when her solo songs hit the charts. She was never girlish; her costumes were formal; her songs, like Sandie’s and Cilla’s, were mostly cover versions of US hits, which she interpreted with the complicated, jerky, sign-language gestures copied from the Motown groups. (1984:25)

US journalist Gillian Garr takes a similarly perfunctory approach in her 1993 book *She’s a Rebel: The History of Women in Rock & Roll* (1993:58–59), but Charlotte Greig is more generous in her history of the girl groups from the 1950s to the 1980s, *Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow?* Greig credits Springfield with being the first British female singer to break away from the “light entertainment or showbiz end of pop” and for combining “the deadpan cool of the British dolly bird with an ability to sing like the black American girl groups” (1989:87). She also attributes a distinctly sexual frisson to Springfield’s glamorous appearance, indisputable singing ability, and the provocatively

anti-romantic nature of some of her songs, which, she argues, succeeded in breaking down significant barriers in sexual behaviour for young women of the “permissive society” of the 1960s:

For the teenage girl, Dusty was the height of decadence; she was grown up, but not in the boring way most adults were; Dusty’s adulthood suggested all sorts of unknown indulgences and pleasures, including the intensely contradictory, confusing experience of sex and romance ... the lyrics [of “You Don’t Have to Say You Love Me”] tend to sum up a certain quality in Dusty that was new to girl pop. This was a kind of masochism that was more than mere teen melodrama; it was a genuine, if rather overblown, expression of real female vulnerability.... Dusty was all about the predicament of the unconventional girl who refuses to tie her man down, and in the mid to late sixties this was beginning to be of central importance to the young woman battling to find her place in an era of sexual liberation. (1989:97–99)

This may be making too much out of an Italian song entitled “Io che non vivo senza te” (“I Can’t Live Without You”), for which English lyrics that had no reference at all to the original were cobbled together hastily by Vicki Wickham and manager-impresario Simon Napier-Bell in the back of a taxi. But it does establish an epochal emotional vulnerability which was also expressed in songs like “Stay Awhile,” “I’ll Love You For A While,” “Let Me Love You Once before You Go,” “Some of Your Loving,” or “Losing You.” The “masochism” these songs express connects with Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel’s encapsulation of the emotional tenor of teenage ballads in the UK in the early 1960s: “This inward-turning, self-pitying quality of many of the slower teenage ballads, the community-of-lost-souls feeling invoked in words and rhythms, is both an authentic rendering of an adolescent mood and a stylised exaggeration of it” (1964:31).

“Vulnerability” is an epithet associated frequently with Springfield’s songs, voice, and personality—most notably by the erstwhile Elton John in Serena Cross’s hour-long television documentary *Definitely Dusty*, where he uses the word several times. It also connects with the “masochism” of her self-mutilation to suggest a case of life imitating art. This is also a prominent feature of *Definitely Dusty*, where the prevailing impression is the marked contrast between the private life of Mary O’Brien (Springfield’s birth name) and the public persona of Dusty Springfield. But Cross cues in a number of the songs to provide comment on important aspects of her career. “See All Her Faces” serves as the theme song at the beginning and end of the program, while Blossom Dearie’s curious 1970 recording of a highly optimistic, fairytale-like tribute song entitled “Dusty Springfield,” with lyrics by Springfield’s one-time lover Norma Tanega, is the title song. “All I See is You” accompanies accounts of the singer’s short-sightedness, “Can I Get a Witness” her tribulations in apartheid South Africa, and “You Don’t Own Me” her conflicts with the music industry and her musical perfectionism. “I Don’t Want to Hear it Anymore” portrays her insistence on having the volume of music up so high in her headphones that she cannot hear her own voice when recording. Her harrowing rendition of Barry Manilow’s soap opera-like “Sandra” alludes to her alcoholism, and the abrasive, intimate “Soft Core,” written by her sometime lover Carole Pope, sums up her “lost years.” “Going Back” accompanies scenes of her funeral and a retrospective of her life,

while live performances of “You Don’t Have to Say You Love Me,” her greatest hit, open and close the program. *Definitely Dusty* achieves a series of evocative glimpses of the singer in a tactful, allusive manner, revealing her lesbianism and alcoholism without sensationalizing them, while using the songs to suggest a vulnerable private life that was often disguised by the lavish, extravagant, and dramatic public persona.

Springfield’s status as an importantly marginal representative of female agency in British pop is noted by novelist and literary critic Michael Bracewell in his eccentric 1998 study of Englishness in pop music, *England is Mine: Pop Life in Albion from Wilde to Goldie*. Bracewell credits Springfield with singlehandedly compensating for the absence of “alternative female rock stars” in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s: “England had not produced a Joni Mitchell, Patti Smith or Janis Joplin, and with the exception of Dusty Springfield’s magnificent succession of soul-bearing singles ... it seemed that women would remain as either fans or girlfriends in the world of pop” (1998:157).

This amounts to an important characterization of Springfield as playing a uniquely performative role in Britain in defining women as pop singers able to express female emotional dilemmas—usually within the rather masochistic parameters of singing about confessional emotional dilemmas—rather than confining them to the more passively affective and imaginary realm of fandom.

The Gay Icon (and the “Dykon”)

Dusty Springfield’s biography can easily be read as a “grand narrative” of a showbiz diva—complete with a downward curve into the “lost years” when her career stalls and she becomes a casualty of alcohol, drugs, sexual victimization, and suicide attempts, before her final redemption. Valentine and Wickham’s encapsulation of her career follows this melodramatic narrative pattern in recounting “the story of a plain girl who became a lovely woman and a star, who hit the bottom, lost it all and then found success again late in life—not because audiences felt nostalgic or sorry for her but because they thrilled, as they always had, to her voice” (2000:7).

This “authorized” biography claims to be “tussling with Dusty’s psychopathology” but merely attempts to explain her self-mutilation, alcoholism, closet lesbianism, food throwing, and temper tantrums in terms of “dancing with the demons” of an Irish Catholic guilt. The book earned the “high” cultural distinction of being reviewed in the *Times Literary Supplement*, where David Foll identified a lack of any attempt to “draw larger lessons” from the biography in terms of the dilemmas of women and gay performers in pop music, the development of British pop in general, and any assessment of Springfield’s musical achievements (2000:18). It is framed within a polemic in which Wickham projects herself as a gay woman coming out in the music industry before ascribing most of Springfield’s darker secrets to her inability to come out.

In his book *Queer Noises*, John Gill argues that gay male pop singers have a duty to “come out” and reveal their sexuality on public record, and that not to do so is homophobic. He begins by expressing what he admits are “Stalinistic attitudes”

(1995:6) against the refusal of the Pet Shop Boys to talk openly about their sexuality. This is despite the fact that Neil Tennant did precisely that in a 1994 interview with the British gay magazine *Attitude*, where he explained his unwillingness to “be a part of this separate gay world” or to “belong to some narrow group or ghetto” (Tennant qtd. in Zuberi 2001:85–86). Comparing the Pet Shop Boys to Noel Coward in relation to “the bourgeois English tradition of discreet perversion and collusion with the establishment,” Gill concludes his opening salvo with the assertion that “perhaps the Pet Shop Boys represent a new conservatism, post-Clause 28, post-Thatcher, in the era of AIDS” (1995:9). The Pet Shop Boys’ public reticence about their homosexuality and oblique references to it in the lyrics of their songs echo Dusty Springfield’s two decades earlier, but Gill is strangely reticent about her sexuality, referring to her only in the context of the 1960s British “beat girls,” whom he excuses as “shackled to the ideologies of the time” (91). This precedes some general remarks about how “immensely greater” the pressures on lesbian performers in the music industry are than on gay men. In a far more sympathetic and insightful reading of the Pet Shop Boys, Nabeel Zuberi argues:

The Pet Shop Boys are unlikely to have made the kind of music they did if they hadn’t been closeted. Their particular evocations of England in the 1980s and 90s depend on a repression that is part of that residue of English nationalism’s effect on the body. Nevertheless their body of work has created a selected aural map of queer urban Britain. (2001:86)

Dusty Springfield plays an important part in this “selected aural map” as a recuperated 1960s British pop icon through the singles she recorded with the Pet Shop Boys and on the 1990 album *Reputation* which was partly produced by them. In a famous 1988 article about the Pet Shop Boys, Simon Frith places them in the context of “ordinary pop taste” represented in Britain since the mid-1960s by “the sound of the weekend teenage disco” as a site of “urgent leisure” and their “use of the gay icon Dusty Springfield to inject true passion into the false crisis of ‘What Have I Done to Deserve This?’” (1988:8). Thus Springfield is mobilized to represent emotional authenticity as well as a historical continuity of British working-class grit, while also evoking a gay subtext that can operate within a predominantly heterosexual club-dance context as well as in exclusively gay “pink zones” such as the gay pubs along Oxford Street in Sydney, where the Hi NRG of the Pet Shop Boys and drag shows featuring Dusty impersonators have been staple fare. Frith argues that the achievement of the Pet Shop Boys’ unashamedly pop and disco music is also political, in managing

to weave together two features of life in late 1980s Britain: the seediness of Mrs. Thatcher’s “enterprise culture” and the wistfulness of post-AIDS lust. In one sense the Pets are simply reversing Tory values, confronting the free-market and a repressive moral order with an account of market oppression and the liberation of desire. (9)

Zuberi extends this reading, arguing that the Pet Shop Boys’ videos can be interpreted in terms of Dollimore’s notion of “transgressive reinscription” (2001:87), offering an evocative reading of their ironic portrayal of London landmarks in terms of an “opposi-

tional photography". This critiques standard British heritage values while offering a conservative but outsider flâneur's view of commodified sexual desire and class values and eliciting implicitly gay responses to traditional British national icons.

Springfield's own recourse to gay imagery was not always as covert as has been assumed. Serena Cross's TV documentary might have considered itself bold in referring to the US singer Norma Tanega as Springfield's "former girlfriend" (after at first coyly labelling her a 'friend'), but apart from "Breakfast in Bed" Springfield also evoked gay experiences in her 1979 song "Closet Man," which, as the liner notes of *Simply Dusty* explain, initially contained the line "why it's older than religion and quite common among nuns," that had to be changed to "why it's older than religion and quite honestly more fun." Her relationship with Carole Pope, the gay Canadian singer of the group Rough Trade, also ushered more explicitly sexual imagery into her songs, especially on the 1982 album *White Heat*, recorded while Springfield was living with Pope in Toronto for a year. This album contained two songs written by Pope and Rough Trade guitarist Kevan Staples, both of which evoke pornographic associations, "I Am Curious" and the Brecht/Weill-influenced "Soft Core." The former describes a delirium of arousal in which the protagonist is "addicted to lethal sexuality / I live life on the edge of ecstasy" and is curious about her lover's motives; the latter, Pope claims was "about living with an alcoholic" (adding that "it was ironic Dusty ended up recording it") (2000a) evokes a state of violently confused, submissive amorous frenzy in which the lover is addressed: "you drag yourself through a maze of alcohol and neon lies ... of drugs and alibis."

Other songs on the predominantly gay-disco, Hi NRG-oriented album are also direct about sexual matters, from the opening disco song "Donnez-moi" to the abrasive, hard-rocking "Blind Sheep" to Sting's "I Don't Think We Could Ever Be Friends." Valentine and Wickham describe *White Heat* as "her most extraordinary album ... tough, unfor-giving and overtly sexual" and suggest its non-release in the UK was due at least partly to the possibility that "the British end may have felt that the album was one step too far away from the Dusty they wanted for English audiences" (2000:209, 211). The cover features Springfield in a crash helmet, emulating the LA roller derby girls, although rumour had it she was hiding bruises from a fight. At the time of writing, the album is still yet to be reissued, and, given its non-release even as a vinyl album in the UK, it is something of an unobtainable fetish object, although "Soft Core," "Donnez-moi," and "Blind Sheep" were included on the 1994 four-CD compilation album *The Legend of Dusty Springfield*, itself now something of an unobtainable fetish object. In his extensive web site entitled "Woman of repute: The unofficial homepage of vocalist Dusty Springfield," M. Bayly compares *White Heat* with Marianne Faithfull's sexually explicit, abrasive, and visceral 1979 comeback album *Broken English*, except for *White Heat*'s elusiveness in the UK and lack of success in the US.¹

Carole Pope contributed a highly dramatic version of "Soft Core" to *Forever Dusty: Homage to an Icon*, a 2000 tribute album featuring some lesbian artists along with "straight" female performers like the Indigo Girls performing songs recorded originally by Springfield, part of the proceeds of which are donated to cancer research. Like most tribute albums, none of the artists featured are able to match the original artist, and the degree by which they fall short constitutes the homage to the "icon" involved. In this

case, feminist principles are mobilized without exclusively lesbian overtones.

Pope's memoir of Springfield, entitled "The Only One Who Could Ever Reach Me" (the opening line of "Son of a Preacher Man"), included as a chapter in her autobiography *Anti-Diva* (2000b), is an explicit, rather melodramatic account of her relationship with the singer, interleaved with recollections of dramatic incidents from Springfield's biography and ending with an account of attending her funeral. It reclaims Dusty as a "dykon," to use an Australian slang term which has gained official currency, with an explicitness which alarmed many of Springfield's more conservative fans. Pope claims from the outset that "we all knew she was gay; she was part of the collective lesbo consciousness. The boys had Rock Hudson. We had Dusty." She portrays Dusty as the "diva" which she opposes, although she also refers to herself as a diva, as well as "an icon ... albeit in a Canadian, self-effacing kind of way" (2000a).

Pope is explicit about Springfield's self-mutilation, sexuality, and alcoholism in an account that is even more sensationalist than Valentine and Wickham's, although she claims Springfield was "mainly silent about her past and the origins of her demons." She recounts a raucous tour of movie stars' homes in Beverley Hills, Springfield's gossip about alcoholic A list singers and actors, and watching the wedding of Prince Charles and Princess Diana with Springfield in 1981 in bed at 5:00 a.m., when Springfield revealed her extensive knowledge of matters relating to the British Royal family (2000a). Springfield also sang backing vocals on a Rough Trade song Pope wrote about the Felliniesque aspects of Catholicism entitled "The Sacred and the Profane." Of her career resurgence with the Pet Shop Boys, Pope states she "was introduced to a new audience; the fags loved her" and is scathing about her gay admirers at her funeral: "The room is full of old queens with bad comb-overs" (2000a). But Andy Robinson was more accepting of the Pope memoir than the authorized biography, claiming "although the chapter contains intimate revelations that would have horrified Dusty, and will no doubt cause her close friends much distress, it is clear that Carole Pope loved Dusty."² This suggests that the raunchier North American Dusty is markedly different from the sedate, demure British Dusty which many of her UK fans prefer to preserve.

This difference is made wider by Valentine and Wickham's revelations of the low points of Springfield's life in Canada and the US in the early 1980s. By the time *White Heat* is released in the summer of 1981, Springfield and Pope have broken up, her brief Toronto sojourn is over, and she is back in LA without a record deal. After selling her record collection to Graham Nash, and then her Jansen guitar, she resorts to lip-synching to her own songs at LA gay bars for \$500 a night and to drugs, self-mutilation, welfare, and AA meetings. She then becomes involved in an abusive relationship with a woman named Tedda who has spent time in prison on an alcohol-related charge. They meet at an AA meeting and later marry in a lesbian wedding ceremony. Dusty and Tedda exchange blows with saucepans during an argument, and Dusty's face is smashed and her teeth knocked out, which disfigures her permanently and even affects her vocal chords, despite plastic surgery paid for by Wickham with money that is partly squandered on drugs. This low point of abjection is eventually followed by a return "home" to the UK in 1985 in a disastrous and grotesque attempt to revive her career. Springfield then sojourns in LA and Amsterdam until 1987, when the Pet Shop Boys intervene.

Photos of the singer from this period, such as the one featured on the third CD of *Simply Dusty*, show her gaunt-faced with hollow cheeks, but by the time she is performing with the Pet Shop Boys her image has filled out, as is shown in the iconic blow-up of her face featured on the cover of the twelve-inch single of “What Have I Done to Deserve This?”

The Voice

Most responses to Dusty Springfield’s singing voice, which Elvis Costello suggested was “like a reed” and “one of the greatest voices in pop music” (in the 1994 TV documentary *Dusty Full Circle*), invoke its grain, which has been described repeatedly as “husky,” “smoky,” “breathy,” “silky,” “sexy,” along with other similar epithets. Neil Tennant of the Pet Shop Boys responded to it in the recording studio as “breathy, warm, thrilling” (in *Definitely Dusty*); Tom Waits, who has one of the most distinctively “grainy” voices in rock music, recalls listening to “Son of a Preacher Man,” and finding her voice “really smoky and low—that’s a sexy song!” (Waits qtd. in Hoskyns 1999:75). A number of fan tributes on the Internet also focus on the emotive, evocative qualities of her voice as the primary feature of their memory of her. From Augusta, Georgia: “her soft, velvety, silky voice will remain in our hearts together”; from Japan: “I will never forget her soft, velvet voice”; from Zurich: “The crystal clear, sandy voice with which she sang will keep on mesmerising me for the rest of my days”; from Ottawa: “Dusty Springfield has been with me as long as pop music has been with me ... her gorgeous haunting voice.... When I heard she died, I suddenly felt old and alone.”³

Springfield’s is a highly soul-oriented voice, to the extent that it is claimed that some African American listeners hearing her for the first time on the radio or on record in the US assumed she was black. This apparent ability to transcend any recognizable vocal features of racial difference through the timbre and expressiveness of her voice and the dramatic projection of personae in her songs suggests siren-like qualities of theatrical deception and seduction. In his 1995 essay “The Body Electric,” Simon Frith notes that “to listen to a voice is to listen to a physical event, to the sound of a body” and that “all good pop musicians ... are seducers and deceivers.” He also discusses how white male rock singers like Jerry Lee Lewis and Mick Jagger emulate black singers in their singing and performance styles, but argues that “no listener could have thought that either Lewis or Jagger was black; every listener realised that they wanted to be” (1995:1, 7). But Springfield’s voice and performance style, which Stewart, Garratt, and Greig, among others, have claimed imitated the black Motown girl singers, surely operate through a much different, and more subtle, mode of “vocal deception” than the racial caricatures of Lewis or Jagger to which Frith refers. A comparison of Springfield’s version of “Dancing in the Street” with the duet of the same song which Jagger performed with Tina Turner is instructive in this regard: there are no attempts at legitimization through association in Springfield’s version, and no attempts to “creolize” her diction or performance style. It is also arguable that Springfield performed implicit cross-gender deceptions in her songs, enabling gay as well as straight listeners to interpret the romantic texts in imaginative readings in which, as Frith notes, “we hear voices as male or female and listen to what they say accordingly—according to our own sexual plea-

tures and preferences" (5). But in Springfield's case, any literal gender transformations in the mode of address to render explicitly gay readings of conventionally straight songs, as in Frith's example of Ian Matthews's gay reading of "Da Doo Ron Ron," were entirely implicit. Even her 1969 rendition of Eddie Hinton and Donnie Fritts's song "Breakfast in Bed" on *Dusty in Memphis*, which begins "You've been cryin' / Your face is a mess / Come in baby / You can dry the tears on my dress," and which became a lesbian anthem (Carole Pope claims Springfield sang it to her in bed), can be given a "straight" reading, as was later shown by UB40 and Chrissie Hynde's version of it in the 1990s.

Springfield's voice evokes for the involved listener what Barthes, in his often-cited essay on "The Grain of the Voice," refers to as "the impossible account of an individual thrill" and a process which "sways us to jouissance." But these evocations of sensuality and sexuality still involve both Barthes's categories of pheno-song and geno-song, which he borrows from Kristeva. The former is present in the rigour and perfectionism with which Springfield recorded her songs, often a word or a syllable at a time, and the care she took with diction and phrasing, "the rules of the genre, the coded form of the melisma, the composer's idiolect, the style of the interpretation." The latter is present in the "volume ... where the melody really works at the language ... the voluptuousness of its sounds-signifiers ... the diction of the language" ([1977] 1990:294, 295). The balance (or tension) between pheno-song and geno-song is implicit in composer Burt Bacharach's seemingly contradictory comments about Springfield's singing voice in his song "The Look of Love" in *Definitely Dusty*: "smoky, sexy, restrained, held in check, but underneath it was smouldering, it was on fire, there was just so much romance, passion, coolness to it" (1999).

In terms of composers' idiolects, Springfield performed many of what were regarded as "definitive versions" of songs by prominent US composers such as Bacharach (often in competition with Dionne Warwick), Gerry Goffin and Carole King, and Randy Newman, and the later songs written specially for her by the Pet Shop Boys. Her readings of these combine fastidious, meticulous attention to phrasing, diction, and timing (what *Dusty in Memphis* producer Jerry Wexler described as "the stigmata of perfectability" in *Definitely Dusty*), often recording songs word-by-word or syllable-by-syllable. As Tennant commented, "Dusty was a tender, exhilarating and soulful singer, incredibly intelligent at phrasing a song, painstakingly building it up to a thrilling climax" (*BBC Entertainment* 12 March 1999). But the resulting grain, as Tennant commented elsewhere, still conveys a powerful sensuality: "She's very husky and breathy with an intensity and desperation to her voice that's fantastically sensual.... She sort of floats off on another plane" (Tennant qtd. in O'Brien 1999:212). This "other plane" provides the listener with an evocative sense of yearning, loss, hope, and the numerous other emotions evoked by the often melodramatic parameters of her songs.

The sense of loss and heartbreak in songs such as "I Just Don't Know What to Do With Myself" and "Goin' Back" is perhaps her most powerful and memorable feature. O'Brien referred to the emotive overtones Springfield produced on her first single, "I Only Want To Be With You" as "that sound of transient pain and husky promise" (1995:63), and Simon Napier-Bell characterized her as 'sounding fragile with great power' (qtd. in Sexton 1999:12). Other descriptions of her voice emphasize her soulful

and melodic qualities associated with African-American soul singers; her long-time backing singer Madeline Bell (qtd. in Valentine and Wickham 2000:47) stated “she had that gospel touch in her voice.” Valentine and Wickham, ever-prone to showbiz emotionalism, stress her “entreating, touching vulnerability; a lightly husky quality that brought her in much more intimate contact with her listener” in “Some of Your Lovin’” (81) and “a painful sense of hurt ... new intimacy ... that told the listener about her vulnerability” in “Goin’ Back” (108). They also emphasize the seductive sensuality of her “breathtaking intimacy” in “The Look of Love,” exposing “a new under-the-covers huskiness she would use in Memphis” (113).

Such responses imply a direct affective connection between listener and singer in which the emotional associations of the song are informed by a knowledge of the singer’s own life, background, struggles, achievements, and suffering. In his article “The electro-acoustic mirror: voices in American pop,” David Brackett notes that

in many styles and genres [of popular music] it is easy for us to imagine that singers are projecting their messages directly to us, that they have experienced what they are singing about. ... It is at this point—the point at which the singing voice participates in the production of meaning—that the idea of “voice” collides with the figure of the author. (1995:11)

Although Dusty Springfield was rarely the “author” of any of the songs she recorded, her direct affective association with the dramatic world of her songs—in which melodrama often exists alongside “genuine’ emotion”—is made possible by the listener. The power of Springfield’s voice, with all its affective associations, to evoke emotions, memories, and feelings is her most memorable and lasting feature, and explains the reverence, devotion, and seemingly irrational dedication of her fans. As one of Dusty’s most astute and empathetic female fans summed up on a fan web site,

Dusty Springfield’s voice was the female voice of the 1960s for me. I still love singing along with her and can remember playing her on vinyl and listening to my transistor radio next to my pillow late at night. Now, I have breast cancer, too. I love you, Dusty. See you on the other side.³

Notes

1. See www.isd.net/mbayly.
2. See www.dustyspringfield.co.uk.
3. All fan quotes are from jupiter.guestworld.com/wgb/Friday_12_March_1999.

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