

Toyah Willcox – Biography



From punk princess to high priestess of TV, Toyah Willcox is a uniquely gifted performer. Charismatic, outspoken and impossible to categorise, she is one of Britain's iconic household names – an award-winning rock legend as well as a much-loved actress and music composer.

In a career spanning thirty years Toyah has had thirteen top 40 singles, recorded twenty albums, written two books, appeared in over forty stage plays, made eleven feature films and presented such diverse television programmes as *The Good Sex Guide Late*, *Watchdog* and *Songs Of Praise*

It all began in her hometown Birmingham in 1977 when film director Derek Jarman offered her the role of 'Mad' in seminal punk epic *Jubilee*. She continued to gain strong roles, appearing alongside Katherine Hepburn in the film, *The Corn is Green*, as well as playing 'Monkey' in the legendary *Quadrophenia*. She teamed up with Jarman again to play Miranda in his innovative version of *The Tempest*, which won her a nomination as Best Newcomer at the 1980 Evening Standard Awards.

By this time Toyah's band was gaining critical success with the debut single *Victims of the Riddle* (no.1 in the independent charts for 12 months) and six track EP *Sheep Farming in Barnet*. Her first album, *The Blue Meaning*, became a Top 40 hit. A TV Documentary "*Toyah*", an accompanying live album *Toyah! Toyah! Toyah!* – as well as hit singles *It's A Mystery*, *I Want to Be Free*, *Brave New World* and *Be Proud, Be Loud, Be Heard* plus the platinum albums *Anthem* and *The Changeling* - confirmed her status as one of the most significant talents of the Eighties. In 1982 she won the Best Female Singer at the Rock & Pop Awards.

Over the next two decades, as well as consolidating her reputation as a singer songwriter (with albums *Minx*, *Desire*, *The Lady or the Tiger* with Robert Fripp and her least commercial album *Prostitute*) Toyah also forged ahead with a career as a stage performer. Notable credits include *Trafford Tanzi* (lead); *Cabaret* (Sally Bowles); *Three Men and a Horse* (winner of Olivier Award for best New Comedy); the UK tour of Arthur Smith's *Live Bed Show*; the title role in *Calamity Jane* (nominated for an Evening Standard Award for Best Musical) and most recently starring as the Devil Queen in the hugely successful rock show, *Vampires Rock*, which continues to tour in 2010. She is also currently starring as the 'Wicked Queen' in *Snow White & the Seven Dwarfs* at the Crucible Theatre in Sheffield.

Musically, the 90s saw Toyah transform from pop star to new wave diva. With her husband Robert Fripp she formed the band *Sunday All Over the World*, which toured world-wide. They recorded their debut album *Kneeling at the Shrine* which received rave reviews and Toyah went on to produce the critically-acclaimed albums *All Over the World*, *Ophelia's Shadow*, *Take the Leap!* and *Dreamchild*.

The 90s also saw Toyah dominate our TV screens. Whether it be drama - as a dog, for example, in the half animated real life drama series *The Ink Thief* or kid's programming (Toyah found renewed cult status as the intro and outro voice of *Teletubbies*), or presenting an 'Alternative Remedies' series on *This Morning*, Toyah's range and versatility was unrivalled. She recorded two series of the BBC's popular *Fasten Your Seatbelt*, two series of the BBC Scotland's kid's drama series *Barmy Aunt Boomerang*, fronted her own BBC1 series *Discovering Eve* and was a regular presenter on *Watchdog*, *The Heaven & Earth Show* and *Holiday*. She also presented *Anything Goes*, *Time Off*, *The Magic & Mystery Show*, *Roll With It!* and *Lottery Greatest Hits*. In 1996, whilst Toyah was making the film *Julie and The Cadillacs*, Michael Aspel surprised her as the subject of BBC1's *This Is Your Life*.

The year 2000 saw the publication of her long awaited autobiography *Living Out Loud* and in 2001 Toyah was awarded a prestigious Honorary Doctorate by the University of Central England in recognition of her distinguished achievements in performing arts, media and broadcasting. Television continued to feature as she fronted forty programmes of *Beyond Medicine* for the Discovery Channel and *Whose Recipe is it Anyway?* for the Carlton Food Network. Carlton Television also made a documentary on Toyah's music career as part of the *Rock Legends* series. Toyah also participated in the 2003 *Celebrity Get Me Out of Here!* and most recently appeared in ITV2's *Secret Diary of a Call Girl* as the mother of lead actress Billie Piper.

Toyah made her first musical recording of the 21st century with a vocal contribution to a track "Lime in the Coconut" with the punk band Chester. She returned to song writing in 2002 with new material for a limited edition EP, *Little Tears of Love* and a one-off preview concert at Ronnie Scotts. In 2002 Toyah proved her staying power selling out eleven stadium gigs for the *Here and Now* Tour. In May 2003 she released a brand new mini-album *Velvet Lined Shell* on her own record label, Vertical Species Records, showcasing a darker, edgier direction. In 2004 she returned to her musical roots as part of *The Best of the 80s Tour* - a UK tour alongside fellow 80s hit-makers Nick Heyward, Curiosity Killed the Cat and Altered Images.

Musically, Toyah has remained fresh, uncompromising and ground-breaking. In 2007 she signed a new worldwide publishing deal with Zomba Music and released her first digital single - *Latex Messiah (Viva La Rebel In You)* from the 2008 album *In The Court Of The Crimson Queen*, written and produced in collaboration with Simon Darlow. Alongside this Toyah began a collaboration with Bill Rieflin (REM) and Chris Wong on the band project, *The Humans*. Described as "European experimental meets West Coast American grunge", *The Humans* debut live performances took place in Estonia in 2007. Their debut album, *We Are The Humans*, was recorded in Seattle in 2008 and released in Estonia in May 2009 to coincide with the band's return to play before the country's president at Tartufest. It received a UK digital release on Sept 2009, along with a *Humans*' single, *These Boots Are Made For Walkin'*.

The Humans, accompanied by Robert Fripp, are back on tour in Feb 2010 and will perform a trio of UK headline concerts at Leamington Spa Assembly (22 Feb); Cambridge Junction (23 Feb) and The Scala, London (24 Feb).

For more about Toyah visit www.toyahwillcox.com