

## ALAN MERCER'S PROFILE

PHOTOGRAPHS, CONVERSATIONS, STORIES AND COMMENTS FROM MY WORKING LIFE.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 2011

### Bob Esty Has Worked With Some Diva's



All Photos: Alan Mercer

Barbra Streisand, Cher, Donna Summer, Sally Kellerman and even Raquel Welch all want Bob Esty! He is responsible for some of their best music. Originally from Massachusetts, the famed music producer and musician has been an LA fixture for years now.

Growing up, Bob was into music like the piano and the all-male choir. He was the student conductor for the glee club. In high school he became a bass player, took up the bass drum and joined the orchestra. He then joined the Baltimore Box Society and The Lyric Opera Company of Baltimore. Bob attended the Peabody

Conservatory for Music where he had enough classical music that was too stuffy. He wanted more musical variety so he moved to New York and wrote for off-Broadway plays while in college. In his New York days he hung out with people like Barry Manilow, Melissa Manchester and Bette Midler.

Mutual manager Stuart Cohen suggested Bob musically direct Sally Kellerman's first tour from Los Angeles. While touring with Sally, Bob performed on 'The Mike Douglas Show,' 'The Tonight Show,' 'Merv Griffin,' and various other popular shows. He commuted back and forth between New York and LA for two years before finally making the decision to live in LA in '75.

Recently he's been going down to Key West, Florida for the past few years working with the Key West Pops Orchestra and the Key West Symphony. Bob says the most memorable experience in the past couple of years was conducting the West Australian Symphony Orchestra with his dear friend and opera star, Julie Migenes.

I remember seeing Bob's name in the credits for all these albums and always thought how lucky and talented he was to work with all these divas. I never expected to know the man, but thanks to Sally Kellerman I do know him and I'm happy to introduce him to all the readers of this blog.



AM: What are you working on today?

BE: I'm working with Scott Snapp, a guy who came into my life about three years ago. I've been helping him with his vocals and his songwriting. He got funding for his new CD and I produced it. We re-arranged all the songs he had written. Basically Scott was open to anything so he would try new things. Now we've been working on his live show based on the CD.

AM: Are you interested in producing more albums again?

BE: Oh yes.

AM: Do you prefer female vocalists?

BE: In a way because I relate to women, but I've produced several guys like 'The Brooklyn Dreams.' When they were on Casablanca they didn't do as well since Casablanca was really just Donna Summer and KISS.

AM: Did you realize Casablanca would be such a big deal?

BE: I didn't know anything about the music business at all. I had never produced anything. I was a keyboard guy.

AM: How did you end up in Los Angeles?

BE: Through Sally Kellerman.

AM: Really!?!

BE: We had the same manager at the time. He managed a lot of cabaret artists.

AM: You are a singer/songwriter yourself. Did you consider having your own performing career?

BE: Yes but I was a duo with Michelle Aller, so I didn't have time. A year into my Casablanca deal I was producing Cher.

AM: So you joined Casablanca when they were on top?

BE: That's right.

AM: How was Neil Bogart to work for?

BE: Delightful. He was the only label president who would play your new projects in his office and dance around. I don't know why he was so lively but he was. He would drop by the studio sometimes and it was always a good time. I learned much later that I was in a bubble and nothing was real.

AM: How did you meet Barbra Streisand?

BE: It was for 'The Main Event.' I didn't want to meet Barbra because no one wants to meet Barbra because she can be so intimidating.

AM: Ultimately you ended up working with her several times.

BE: Yes I did. Paul Jabara drove me to her home in his Lamborghini.

AM: Did Paul Jabara really trap Donna Summer in a bathroom and make her listen to 'Last Dance?'

BE: Yes in Puerto Rico. That was the good part of him. We used to call him the sales man. Just don't have anything to do with him after five. Paul was a genius at recycling his material and once he met Donna Summer he had her doing all his demos, but she never recorded anything of his after 'Last Dance' which bothered him to his dying day.

AM: You produced a couple of albums for him didn't you?

BE: Well one and a half. Half of the first one and all of the second one. He was mad at me by the time his third album came along.

AM: I love the albums you did with Roberta Kelly, especially the Disco Gospel album.

BE: Oh yeah.

AM: Do you know Roberta these days?

BE: I was just in touch with her because of Facebook. I haven't seen her since a couple years after 'Gettin' In The Spirit' came out. I love 'Oh Happy Day' and also "Come Go With Me To My Father's House.' It's getting re-released this summer.

AM: Have you lost track of most of the people from that time?

BE: Yes, basically when they started burning my records in stadiums...

AM: How did that feel?

BE: Well it was sort of off putting to say the least. I had visions of Nazi Germany. Basically all the DJ's wanted rock n' roll.

AM: Ultimately they lost because dance music never left.

BE: They didn't like the fact that most of the music was coming from Europe and it wasn't American.

AM: Why was there a video for Cher's 'Hell On Wheels' song? There was no videos at this time.

BE: I don't know why. It was just a promotional tool. It played in clubs. Same as the video for 'It's Raining Men' which was at the beginning of MTV but they wouldn't play it. They wouldn't show race music videos until Michael Jackson.

AM: It seems hard to believe now. You entered Cher's career at a very important time for her. She was on a downturn and you made her relevant and current again. 'Take Me Home' was huge!

BE: Oh yes. Michelle Aller went on the road with her as a back-up singer and became the closest thing to Cher as a friend. They would go walking in West LA. Cher is a lot of fun! I took over the production of the 'Take Me Home' which was originally being produced by Ron Dante.

AM: I didn't know that!

BE: It was a very typical Cher album of the time, but it didn't fit into the Casablanca sound and profile. Neil wanted to bring her back as a Disco Clotheshorse.

AM: Tell me about that album cover. It's one of her most memorable.

BE: Now I understand it, but at the time I said to myself, "Who would take her home?" In the original photo she was painted gold. Then they had to airbrush her skin. The 'all gold' didn't read. In a way the same thing happened with the 'Prisoner' album. We had to add the song 'Prisoner' to justify the album cover.

AM: What about Miss Streisand? Is she fun?

BE: First of all Barbra doesn't understand she has a sense of humor even though she's played comedy all her life, there for when she says something and people laugh, she says, "Oh is that funny?" And she means it. Cher is a lot more down to earth.

AM: How wonderful to work with all these divas. Another one you've worked with, who isn't really a singer, is Raquel Welch.

BE: Once again Paul Jabara made the deal and almost lost it! He called me and said he was having a meeting with Raquel Welch. He wanted her to do 'This Girl's Back In Town' and initially I thought, "Why!?!"

AM: Did you want to work with her?

BE: I had briefly worked with her in 1975 for a live show. Raquel is very funny. When we were in New York and she was meeting the musicians she arrived in a trench coat and a sweater, a hat and dark sunglasses. She leaned into my ear and said, "Watch this." She takes off all the bulky clothes and shows off her curves and goes over to the guys and says, "Hello, my name is Raquel." She was putting it on. It was very much like Marilyn.

AM: Was there anyone you wouldn't work with?

BE: The biggest name in show business, Frank Sinatra.

AM: Was it offered to you?

BE: Yes but I didn't think he should do a disco album.

AM: What is the best thing about being on Facebook for you?

BE: I like people sending me links to music videos of my songs on YouTube. I haven't heard some of those songs in twenty or thirty years.



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**7 COMMENTS:**



[The Fabulous Fringe Family](#) said...

I really love how all of these unique and fascinating people enter your life Alan. Once again "The Law of Attraction" holds true. I love all of these photos and I believe that the last one of Bob smiling really captures his love of life. What a remarkable journey he has had and is still travelling. Fabulous!

FEBRUARY 7, 2011 8:04 AM

Kate Rossi Stuart said...

I loved reading this, Alan. Since Bob is a FB friend it was great to learn more about him. You know how much I adore Cher so I enjoyed reading Bob's remarks about Cher in particular. He is a very talented man. The photos are beautiful! Congratulations on another outstanding job!

FEBRUARY 7, 2011 12:17 PM

Mary Blake said...

This was a great Blog to Which I will come back and re-read Wow working with Barbra Streisand!! One of my all time favorite people too as are some of the others .Will be on the Look out for Scott Snapp's new music also now . What a talented Man BOB is I must be honest I did not know all this- .. And your pictures are again SO wonderful Bob has the warmest eyes. I do not as you know see well but who could not miss his eyes light up when he smiles you captured that kindness there Alan wonderful blog I will again reread it...will be happy to .learn more about him as well as he accepted my friendship on f/b. ty alan you opened a whole new world for me and others to see our favorite people and meet new people and share a glimpse into the real lives of them too babbling done ha x

FEBRUARY 7, 2011 1:41 PM



By John B said...

Loved your interview with Bob Esty , what a amazing career he has had and is still having , I too knew his work , but learned so much more about him . He as well seems so down to earth, and a great spirit . So many great Diva's he has worked with , bet he has stories for days, It was a great blog, the pictures were amazing . One after the next you know and get to meet the most wonderful talents there in LA, I love your blogs as you know , Congratulations for another fine job , keep up the fun and the great work . Hugs John B

FEBRUARY 7, 2011 2:11 PM



PLACE PHOTOGRAPHY said...

this is amazing.... Bob is one of my dearest friends and love him so much

FEBRUARY 7, 2011 2:11 PM



Michael Shorde said...

Great work, Alan! Once again you've shown us not only another interesting and talented personality, but reconfirmed your own talent (as if you had to do that). Bravo!

FEBRUARY 7, 2011 2:38 PM

Deborah Ann Reigle said...

Beautiful blog on the man behind some of the most beautiful music. You both rawk in your crafts! Your blog is gorgeous in it's content and art! I will be back again and again as I could get lost here as in a library! I would love to share your blog! Encore!!..smile!

FEBRUARY 7, 2011 5:22 PM