

She Takes our Self Control

'80s legend Laura Branigan talks with Dean Johnson about love, loss, and her live show at HomoCorps. One night, while I was DJing at an East Village club, a friend came to the booth and told me he was on his way to Connecticut for a Laura Branigan concert. He said that she had just started touring for the first time since her husband's death and was putting out a new CD. On a whim, I grabbed my copy of Laura Branigan's Greatest Hits, played her nightlife anthem „Self Control“ and shouted into the P.A. system microphone, „Laura Branigan rules!“ The crowd loved it. A few days later, the same friend came back with a dinner napkin on which were scribbled the words: „Dean - Wish you were here! Thanks for everything...love, Laura Branigan.“ Then I got a phone call from her management telling me that Laura had heard about HomoCorps, the monthly music showcase I produce at CBGB, and wanted to play live with her band on March 9. How could I say no? Recently, Laura and I chatted over International Flavored Instant Coffees while relaxing on the terrace of the Fifth Avenue co-op I recently purchased from the estate of the late Jacqueline Onassis.

Laura, before we start, I just want to tell you how sorry I was to hear about your husband passing away.

Yes, it was four years ago. That's really why I just disappeared for a while. I took care of him for two-and-a-half years. He had cancer, and then he died. He stayed alive on herbal treatment for a long time. They had given him two months to live, and we beat the odds, so never believe what they say.

One of the great things about having a gay following is that they always rally around you during times of adversity.

They are the most incredible audience in the world. There's been so much loss in the gay community. I have a song on the new CD called „I Know You By Heart“. It's all about loss. I believe when a person dies, the memories keep that person's spirit near you. I'll be singing it at CBGB.

You're familiar with CBGB's history, right? It's „The Cradle of Punk“.

Yeah. I don't think I've ever played a place like this before.

HomoCorps is a showcase I started a couple of years ago to support gay and lesbian musicians. By appearing on the bill, you're doing exactly that- giving support. Why do you think you have so many gay fans?

They've been through a lot of pain, so they latch onto the singers with heart, they relate to the pain. And they're also incredibly innovative, they're onto it before anyone else! They knew about „Gloria“ before the rest of the world caught on.

Speaking of „Gloria“ what did that girl do to you, anyway? You read her for filth in that song!

[Laughs.] I what?

You read her for filth.

[Laughs again.] I've never heard that expression before! No, the lyrics are about the whole '80s scene, people running wild, doing drugs, going insane, you know, „Hearing voices in your head“.

Fascinating. You've had so many hits, like „Solitaire“ and „How Am I Supposed To Live Without You“, but the song my friends and I relate to the most is „Self Control“.

Everyone cheers when I play it at a club. I'll be singing it that night.

Great. I've always loved ABBA, and they have so many great songs, but why did you pick „The Winner Takes It All“ to be your next single?

I've always loved that song, always. And it's great for my voice.

I hear there's a harder, edgier club mix also being released.

Yeah, it's really underground, really hard. It's very cool.

What's the name of the new CD?

I don't have a name for it yet, but I think I'm gonna call it The Challenge. We're releasing it to radio the same week as the HomoCorps show on March 9. Radio has been asking for it, which is great.

I read that you used to sing backup for Leonard Cohen. I love him. He even dated Rebecca De Mornay when he was 60 and she was 27.

[Laughs.] I didn't know that. Singing backup for him was my first paying job and the only job I've ever had singing for someone else. I had never been anywhere, and then I got this job touring through Europe with Leonard, who's this incredible performer, even though he just stands there in this rumpled little suit with a guitar. He's very „out there“, he's a poet. He has a cult following in the United States, but in Europe he's really adored. They love him.

I heard you had a really bad accident recently.

Yeah, in June, just as I was feeling like the hardcore pain of losing Larry had been put in the right place and I was ready to go on. I have a beautiful house on a lake upstate. I was climbing a ladder to hang wisteria, I had my cell phone in one hand, and the ladder broke. I fell with my legs behind me and broke both my hips.

Oh my God.

Thank God I wasn't killed. My phone went flying, and I got a stick and pulled it over to me. I called my friend and said, „What do I do?“. It was a bad, bad break.

How long were you in the hospital?

Three weeks. I had two operations. I have pins in both my femur bones, and screws and plates. I had to cancel some shows, and I felt terrible about it.

I think we all are, aren't we?

Laura Branigan performs March 9 at HomoCorps at CBGB (315 Bowery @ Bleeker St), \$12/ \$9 with I.D.

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