

Song

**LAURA BRANIGAN WINS BIG
PLAYING *SOLITAIRE*,
BUT HER EX-MANAGER
WANTS \$15 MILLION**

Legal squabbles aside, Branigan (at a rented Long Island retreat) lately finds life just ducky.

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As a singer, one way to tell how well you're doing is to look at the chart; another is to see who's fighting about you. On both counts, Laura Branigan, 26, has arrived: Following up her disco sizzler *Gloria*, which sold 1.4 million copies last year, this year's *Solitaire* reached the Top 10—and her ex-manager, Sid ("I brought the Beatles to America") Bernstein, 56, has lodged a \$15 million suit against her for breach of contract. "Sid had good intentions, but I don't think he was a hard worker," says Branigan's husband, New York lawyer Larry Kruteck, 40. Responds Bernstein, "What I think of Kruteck is not fit to print."

The story has a familiar ring. In 1977 Branigan, then a New York waitress, buttonholed Bernstein, whose clients have also included the Rascals and the Bay City Rollers, and talked him into listening to her sing. "She did an original song called *A Rose and a Tear*, and I cried," says Bernstein. "I worked with Judy Garland for years and she never did that to me." Although Bernstein landed Laura a \$50,000 advance with Atlantic Records, she says that by May of 1982 she felt her career was stalling and fired him—Bernstein says illegally. "The more I learned about the music business, the more I realized I had to break it off," says Branigan, who signed with a new manager, Susan Joseph. Then *Gloria* was released, Brani-

gan became rich, and Bernstein sued. "I put all my eggs in one basket," he says. "When Laura left me I was crushed and devastated. I now see that gambling my reputation and livelihood on one girl's vocal cords was tantamount to committing professional suicide." The \$15 million, he figures, will revive him. The case, which is still in the preliminary stages, may well be settled out of court.

The imbroglio is only one sign that Branigan means business. When *Gloria* became the favorite in gay discos last year, Branigan toured relentlessly on what promoters—a fraternity not known for its tact—refer to as the "AIDS circuit," predominantly homosexual dance halls from New York's Fire Island to San Francisco. In between, "She worked the phones and radio stations like a pro," says Doug Morris, president of Atlantic. For her part, Branigan says that her hard work, leather pants and breathy urgency are all part of a plan to establish credentials before revealing her true self—which she says is a shy, romantic bal-ladeer. "I want to get myself out there," says Branigan, "before I reveal the sentimental part of me."

That, and the rest of her robust 5'7" self, developed in the rural New York town of Brewster. Both her father, a mutual fund broker, and mother, an account executive at a mail brokerage

firm, have good singing voices, and Laura recalls "practicing harmonies with friends in dark rooms with just a candle" while she was growing up. Timid as a child, she found an outlet in high school drama, and after graduation attended the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in New York, intent on a Broadway career. Next came waitressing and chasing down casting agents, which is what she was doing when Bernstein found her—or vice versa—six years ago. "He's a lovely man," says Branigan. "I hope there's no personal animosity."

At a St. Patrick's Day party in 1980, she met Larry Kruteck, a divorcee with two grown children and a corporate lawyer in a firm that handles some entertainment law cases. They wed in December 1981. Since then, having a wife on the road 80 percent of the time "has taken some getting used to," says Kruteck, who adds that the price of keeping their marriage going has been "huge phone bills." The couple currently live in a one-bedroom Manhattan apartment, but are contemplating a move. "It's going to be a big move," says Laura. "I want a place where I can have horses."

Professionally, her goals are equally grand: to break into the movies, and to break a few hearts. Says Branigan, "I want to move people the way Edith Piaf did." **CARL ARRINGTON**

Branigan hit the ground running when *Gloria* became a hit last summer. Now she's taking time off to hit the beach.

