



Retroland, (www.retroland.com) the definitive pop-cultural website, interviews one of our all-time faves, Captain and Tennille!

For more information on Captain and Tennille, visit <http://retroland.com/pages/retropedia/music/item/6031>

The Interview

Part One: Growing Up

Retroland: Growing up, what was your favorite music?

Captain replies: R&B, Fifties rock, soul-type / New Orleans type stuff.

Toni replies: I loved Big Band Jazz, great pop/jazz singers like Sarah Vaughn, Frank Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald, Joe Williams....just a name a FEW! Also classical music, particularly the Romantic and Impressionist composers. AND, I loved the pop music of the day, like the Coasters and The Platters, and all the dance and party music of the 50s.

Retroland: Favorite singers/groups?

Captain replies: Fats Domino, pianist Johnny Johnson - who played in recordings of Chuck Berry, Albert King - blues performer.

Toni replies: Frank Sinatra, Sarah Vaughn, Ella Fitzgerald, Joe Williams, Peggy Lee, The HiLos, the King Sisters, the Four Freshmen.

Retroland: Favorite songs?

Captain replies: Fats Domino, "Blue Monday," Beach Boys, "Don't Worry Baby," Aretha Franklin, "Respect," and The Eagles, "Take It Easy"

Toni replies: I could NOT name a favorite. I was just in love with music, and have so many favorite songs, it would be impossible to name them all.

Retroland: Growing up, what were your favorite movies?

Captain replies: Blackboard Jungle, any 'prison' movie, 'The Godfather'!!

Toni replies: Well, being a southern girl, of course I adored GONE WITH THE WIND, and when I was a little girl, I loved all of the Disney movies like CINDERELLA, BAMBI, DUMBO, etc.

Retroland: And your favorite movie stars?

Captain replies: EDWARD G. ROBINSON.

Toni replies: I was TOTALLY in love with Montgomery Clift. Add Paul Newman to that list, too. And for female stars....Kathryn Hepburn, and Vivian Leigh (because she WAS Scarlett O'Hara!)

Retroland: Favorite cartoon characters?

Captain replies: Bugs Bunny, Scrooge McDuck, early CASPER (The ghost)

Toni replies: CASPER THE FRIENDLY GHOST, PEPE LE PEW, and THE ROADRUNNER.

Retroland: Growing up, what were your favorite toys?

Captain replies: The little blocks that gave one multiple-choice selections of creating a human-face, based upon multiple choices for the differing types of: - eyes, hair, mouth, eyebrows, hats, ears, nose, etc.

Toni replies: I wasn't really into toys, per se. I loved to play "dress up" and put on little shows with my sisters.. My sister, Jane, and I played "Princess", and, of course, since there had to be a prince, we had to take turns being him, although we MUCH preferred being the lovely princess.

Retroland: Do you remember your favorite snacks?

Captain replies: My mother's home made custards / puddings: I licked the pan. Also, Hershey's "kisses" wrapped in tin foil. Oreos, Graham Crackers.

Toni replies: I loved jawbreakers, because they took a long time to eat. I'm sure they were terrible for my teeth! I also loved pecan pie, my mother's lemon pie made with sweetened condensed milk and graham cracker crust, and anybody's birthday cake, as long as it had butter cream frosting with flowers made out of the icing. When I got my slice, I would cut off most of the cake part, and just eat the icing.

Retroland: Who were your heroes? (Musicians, actors, parents, etc)

Captain replies: Elvis, Abbott & Costello, Laurel & Hardy.

Toni replies: I can't remember having "heroes" per se. I idolized great musical artists like singers Ella Fitzgerald, Frank Sinatra, and Joe Williams, band leader Count Basie, and jazz pianist Errol Garner.

Part Two: Career

Retroland: How did you two meet?

Captain replies: Toni & I met 'professionally' in San Francisco, at a theatre where Toni's

musical was being performed. The musical was entitled, 'Mother Earth'... an 'ecology' based musical... where the production needed a 'replacement' keyboard player... and I flew up to audition for the band. I got the gig. One might say we fell in love 'at first sound'.

Toni replies: We met in San Francisco in the summer of 1971. I had written the score for a musical called MOTHER EARTH..an ecology-themed show. We were performing it at the Marines Memorial Theatre there, and we needed a new keyboard player. Daryl was recommended to me, and he flew up to San Francisco to audition for me. When he played for me, he made me laugh. That's when I knew he was my kind of musician!

Retroland: Tell us about performing with the Beach Boys.

Captain replies: I was hired as a keyboard player/arranger for the 'boys' in 1967, to help fill out the band's sound, when Brian Wilson stopped road-touring. All I can say is: Without that invaluable experience of touring with 'the boys' for six-or-so years, and thus, learning the 'rules of the road' so to speak, re. being 'on time', dedicated to playing the same tunes over and over in different cities, for tours that could last months or more, I don't think Toni & I could've 'geared up' successfully, to launch our own career as Captain & Tennille. THANK YOU, BEACH BOYS... for this opportunity, and introduction into the real, pop music scene.

Toni replies: Daryl got me the gig. He convinced Carl Wilson, who was acting as Music Director, that I could do the job. Then Daryl taught me the acoustic piano parts. Carl hired me sight unseen and unheard based on Daryl's recommendation! The most interesting thing about being the first (and only) Beach Girl was that security guards at the various venues would not believe me when I tried to go onstage for the show. I'd say, "I'm with the band," and they'd say, "Sure you are....now go away." I had to get the Road Manager to assure the guard that I WAS a band member.

Retroland: Tell us about The Dragons.

Captain replies: "THE DRAGONS" were originally my father's name for HIS band, which he had with his brothers back in the 1920's, when he was growing up. Later, (my generation), 'THE DRAGONS' consisted of myself, plus MY BROTHERS, Doug & Dennis, who were actually signed to Capitol Records in the early sixties as an instrumental group. We didn't 'make it'. - THEN - 'The Dragons' consisted of myself and my wife, Toni Tennille, who were working the 'club circuit' in the Los Angeles area.

Toni replies: Daryl and his brothers Doug and Dennis formed a musical group together and called themselves The Dragons when they were in their teens. Daryl and I did NOT want to call ourselves that. And, besides, I was a TENNILLE! In 1972-74, we weren't yet married.

Retroland: When did you decide to become Captain and Tennille?

Captain replies: After a few years as 'The Dragons', - performing in local clubs in the L.A. area, we were offered the opportunity to record our own 'demo's - which a local radio station DJ promised would get 'airplay' if we recorded something. We recorded

(with the help of a man named Morgan Cavett, who owned a local recording studio), a number of tunes, including a tune entitled 'The Way I Want To Touch You', which Toni wrote. We decided at that time to call ourselves 'Captain & Tennille', (rather than 'the dragons', or 'daryl & toni', or whatever). That "Touch You" tune was played on the air, as the local DJ promised, and eventually led (with its success as a local hit) to a record deal with A&M Records.

Toni replies: We started calling ourselves that around 1973, when we were working at The Smokehouse in Encino, CA. Actually, Daryl thought of it. He had been nicknamed Captain Keyboard by Mike Love of the Beach Boys, so he decided we should be called CAPTAIN and Tennille. He said it would be easier for people to remember the name....at least they might be able to remember "Captain", even if they couldn't think of (or spell) "Tennille".

Retroland: Can you relate an anecdote or memory from the recording of Love Will Keep Us Together?

Captain replies: I remember, after the tune was pretty well finished (with the recording process) that A&M Records, studio employees / secretaries, were noticed 'hanging outside' our recording studio hallway listening to the playback of 'Love Will..'. They were very excited about the recording, and said they 'loved' it. THUS... we invited them into the studio, and asked them if they'd be willing to 'hand-clap' along at the end of the tune, 'cheer', whistle, etc.... where we would then record their excitement and enthusiasm. They obliged: So, if you listen to the ending of the tune, you WILL hear 'whistles', claps in rhythm, etc. Yes, that's when we knew we had something special.

Toni replies: My sisters, Louisa, Melissa and I were having so much fun singing the backgrounds for LOVE WILL KEEP US TOGETHER. And Daryl and I were just thrilled to have found the song, which we knew was perfect for us, and during the recording sessions it was shaping up to have hit potential. Neil Sedaka, who wrote it along with Howie Greenfield, had just released an album called SEDAKA'S BACK, and Daryl said, "You girls should sing "Sedaka is Back" at the end, when you're doing those "Da...da-da-da da's" So we did. Sedaka WAS back, and we had reason to hope we'd have our first hit record.

Retroland: Tell us about your TV show (which is now available on DVD!)

Captain replies: My favorite memory was actually the amazingly rare opportunity to share the 'stage' with the legendary GEORGE BURNS... and actually being asked by Mr. Burns to play piano behind his famous style of 'singing a tune in five seconds or less'... with the pianist expected to follow along at lightning speed with his style of abbreviating tunes. What an honor...and how nervous I was, BUT - I was SO GLAD that I could kinda actually 'do it'.

Toni replies: The TV Show was exciting, scary, exhausting, and sometimes really fun. We had so many wonderful guests....really great and legendary stars, like George Burns and Bob Hope. I remember doing a long sketch with Bob Hope...a silly thing, but lots of fun. He was a diamond cutter, and I was a very rich "society" woman, who needed a HUGE diamond cut perfectly. I watched that skit again after 30 years, and realized that I

held my own VERY well with the great comic, Bob Hope. I was pretty proud of myself. Then there was the musical number Daryl and I and my sisters, Louisa and Melissa, did with George Burns. When I watched that one after 30 years of not seeing it, I almost fell over with how wonderfully funny and charming it was. George led the way, and we were right there with him!

Retroland: What are your personal favorite Captain and Tennille recordings?

Captain replies: "You Never Done It Like That", "Shop Around", "Come In From The Rain", "Davey, I Misbehave", "But I Think It's A Dream", "Do That To Me One More Time", (check out many of Toni's original compositions.. her music-writing gift is truly AMAZING !!).

Toni replies: Some of my very favorites are songs that were never on the charts. Three tunes by Bruce Johnston (of the Beach Boys) come to mind...an absolutely lovely tune called DON'T BE SCARED and another heartbreaking song called THANK YOU BABY and a haunting arrangement by the legendary Gordon Jenkins of IF THERE WERE TIME. Bruce wrote I WRITE THE SONGS, and that is a really fine song, of course. But we recorded several of his tunes that I think are even better...the three I just mentioned, and DISNEY GIRLS. Bruce is a just a great songwriter. Our recording of Billy Preston's SONG OF JOY just knocks me out every time I hear it...I think it is absolutely thrilling. Of the songs I have written that we have recorded, I like LOVE ME LIKE A BABY, KEEPING OUR LOVE WARM, DEEP IN THE DARK, and BABY YOU STILL GOT IT. I'm sure there are so many others I love, but those are the ones I can think of right off the top of my head.

Retroland: Toni, tell us about singing back-up on Pink Floyd's The Wall.

Toni replies: From time to time, Bruce Johnston and Carl Wilson of the Beach Boys, a studio singer named John Joyce, and I sang backup vocals for various recording artists. It didn't happen that often, since we were all on the road quite a bit, and were rarely in town at the same time, but we still managed to do some background work for Elton John and Art Garfunkel among others. Bruce called me one day, and asked me if I'd be interested in doing some background vocals for PINK FLOYD. He said they were doing a new album and needed some singers. I must confess that, although I had heard of them, I hadn't heard any of their music. I thought it would be really interesting to do a session with them to see how a very famous rock band worked in the studio. I guess I expected to see everyone lying around, smoking dope or something. Instead it turned out to be one of the most professional recording sessions I have ever been involved with. There are more stories about that session and what came after it, but you'll have to dig into my blog, TONI'S TAKE to find out the rest.

Retroland: Toni, tell us about your solo career singing the great standards.

Toni replies: My father was a big band singer in the late 1930s. Daddy had a beautiful

tenor voice, and he was young, blond and handsome to boot! He sang with Bob Crosby's band, the Bobcats, and I truly believe he had a good shot at becoming famous as a singer. However, his father (my grandfather) died at an early age, and daddy had to quit show business to run the family furniture store. It broke his heart, but he had to do it. He instilled in me a love and appreciation of the great singers, musicians, songwriters and big bands of the 30s and 40s. In 1984, I released my first album of standards, MORE THAN YOU KNOW. Daddy was in the control room, listening, as we did the recording. I knew how much it meant to him to hear me sing the songs he loved so much. He died not too long after that, but whenever I sing that music with big bands or symphony orchestras, I always feel that he is there, listening.

Part Three: Now

Retroland: Tell us about the Secret of Christmas, your studio album in over a decade—and your first-ever Christmas album!

Toni replies: I truly think this CD is the best overall CD we have ever done. We have never been able to do an album of similar-sounding songs...nice and smooth like, say, James Taylor. Our musical tastes are just too eclectic to try to stay within one musical style. So...like a typical Captain and Tennille album...THE SECRET OF CHRISTMAS has a real mix of songs. There's a fun and silly song for kids (I WANT A HIPPOPOTAMUS FOR CHRISTMAS), something lovely and mellow for the older folks (THE SECRET OF CHRISTMAS), a boogie style, kind of sexy song (BOOGIE BABY CHRISTMAS), and a spiritual sort of song (THE CHRISTMAS STAR). And then there is Daryl's wonderfully weird instrumental, DARYL OF THE BELLS. All of the songs are very different from each other, but we figure that in this day and age when listeners can just choose certain tracks to put on their ipods, it should work out just fine. The most important thing to us is that we worked very hard to make each track a little gem. There are no "fillers" on this CD!

Retroland: Tell us about your future plans. Will there be concert tours? A new TV show?

Toni replies: Our future touring plans are on hold for now until we finish building our new home in Prescott, Arizona. We are hoping it will be finished in the spring. After that, we'll be making some plans to get out there again in some capacity. As for television.....we're both open for ideas!