

# CLUBWORLD



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# the queen is back



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## Donna Summer on remixes, disco, and her 17-year hiatus from recording

By Kerri Mason

If you've ever been on a dancefloor, period, then you've swayed to the voice of Donna Summer. Whether it was "Last Dance" on a Sunday afternoon at a Junior Vasquez marathon, "Hot Stuff" at your cousin's wedding, or "Love To Love You Baby" at a Francois K classics party, Summer is the voice of the American dance experience, '70s through '80s, commercial to underground.

This year, after a 17-year hiatus from recording (live album "VH1 Presents: Live & More Encore!" came out in 1999), the diva is mounting a return to the spotlight. Her new, multi-genre album, "Crayons" (Sony/Burgundy), hits stores on May 20, and has already spawned a Billboard Hot Club Play Chart No. 1: "I'm A Fire," produced by one of dance's own, Sebastian Arocha Morton (best known for manning the board on Samantha James' lush "Rise"). Another of the album's thumping, hip-hoppy tracks: the declarative "The Queen Is Back."

### It's been 17 years since your last full original album. What took so long?

I started this process in 2001, and then 9/11 happened, and I went into a tailspin like everything else did. Everything was put on hold, and I just had no desire to be recording. We started [again] last year in February, writing new songs. We just said, "We're gonna go

for it and see what we come up with," try and be a little bit more in the moment. I wanted to do different types of songs, not necessarily be in any one ballpark, but to cross the board.

### What ballpark would you say you were in before?

Well I just think, you know, getting out of an imagery of...I am who I am obviously, and some of that is just me. But part of it is trying to become the songwriter that I am and to be viewed that way, and not so much as just a disco singer, or to not have a description attached to the word "writer" or "singer." Just, this is what I do for a living, and everything is accepted in a more general sense, as opposed to a more specific sense.

At first [Sony] wanted me to record oldies, and I just flat-out refused them. I think my public – the people who support me and who want to hear from me – they want new songs. I think it's all about the songs, and if we have young songs, young people will buy them, and if we have good songs, both young and old people will buy them. So that's what we have to try to do: Write songs that are commercially viable, that are gonna hit the heartbeat where people live.

### How did you hook up with Sebastian Arocha Morton for the album's lone dance track, "I'm A Fire"? I decided there were

some people I was going to write with. The record company didn't bring him to me. He's warm, Latino, intelligent, just a fiery guy, really sweet, and I love working with him. He's got a lot of soul and a lot of passion. I actually wrote quite a few songs with him; they didn't all make it onto the album because they were kind of in a similar vein, so we're going to save a couple of them for the next album.

### Have you heard all the different remixes of "Fire"? I have heard them.

I never quite understand remixes. I'm always like, where's the song? Why is the song missing? It is not the same song here. It's a little frustrating, someone taking your copyright and screwing it around. It's like, that's not my copyright; that's not how we wrote it. It's an adjustment for any writer, even if you like some of [the remixes]. You want the audience to hear what you present to them as the song. I like the original [of "Fire"] the best, and I asked [the label], "Why do we need to have these remixes? What's wrong with the original?" And they said, "This is just the way the business is." I'm like, "OK, well then, help yourself."

### What are some of the other songs like? I used to drive by the iPod ad, the shadow of the kids dancing, and I was so taken by that that I de-

cidated to write a song based on what that looked like. The song is "Mr. Music." Every time I saw that ad, it looked so euphoric, and I said, "That's how music makes you feel when you love it." When it's a part of you, you've gotta have music in your life. My little granddaughter wouldn't think about spending a day without hearing a song. She just can't do it. My husband is the same way, we all are. We love music, and if we're not hearing it someplace we're singing it. It's a part of us; it's part of the human experience.

### What do you make of the state of the music industry these days; the collapse of the traditional record label structure?

I think it is as it should be; that is the way of the world. I think that's going to be the way of everything: The same way you can go to the drugstore and buy things that you used to have to get a prescription for. They're cutting out the middleman on every level.

For me though, I'm old school. I'm used to having somebody run all the interference. I don't even know how to run a record label; it's not my thing. I paint, I do a lot of other things, I just started by own foundation, so I have to determine at this point in my life where I can best utilize my time. That's the only thing we can't buy.



