

Interview with Dionne Warwick ahead of Birmingham show

📅 TUESDAY 25TH AUGUST 2015

She's a multi-Grammy Award winner, sold millions of records and is ready for a UK tour. It's singing legend Dionne Warwick.



Dionne after winning the lifetime achievement award at the 2012 Mobo Awards

As female singers go, very few can say they have enjoyed more musical success than Dionne Warwick.

In fact, aside from Aretha Franklin, no other has splashed their name all over the record books quite like Dionne. And you've got to R-E-S-P-E-C-T her for that.

In her half a century singing to audiences worldwide, New Jersey-born Dionne, 74, has bagged five Grammy wins and a further eight nominations. She's the second most-charted female vocalist of all time (oh, Aretha!) with 69 of her singles making the Billboard Hot 100 between 1962 and 1998. She's one of the last bastions of a more traditional music industry and she's agreed to chat with us – we're delighted.

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We catch up with her ahead of her appearance at Birmingham's Barclaycard Arena where she'll perform on the Legends Live tour alongside soul legends Roberta Flack, the Drifters and Mary Wilson of the Supremes. She's excited to be visiting for the short, three-date tour.

"I always look forward to coming to the UK," she says. "I have been since the early 60s travelling to you folks, you are always wonderful audiences!"

It's an exceptional career to have had, and Dionne is still in great voice. She earned her first Grammy Award in 1968 for Do You Know the Way to San Jose and a second in 1970 for the best-selling album I'll Never Fall in Love Again. She's in the Grammy Hall of Fame too, along with having her name against dozens of other musical accolades.

To look back on 54 years might mean that a tour like this one is a bit of a bow out of the spotlight, but it's far from it. But despite critics perhaps wondering whether it's a strictly money-making effort, like artists 50 years her junior, Dionne still has high hopes and ambitions for her career.

"I have been truly blessed to have sustained for 54 years in this business and have accomplished so many incredible things. Being able to be considered and surprised with honours of any sort is the what makes it all worthwhile. The Oscar, the Emmy and the Tony Awards would be honours to work towards in the future."

But when we ask what Dionne would consider a career highlight, she's stumped. "There have been so many over these 54 years to think of just one to be the biggest highlight is really difficult. I'm still doing what I love after a half century is a highlight.

"I love what I do and the joy of bringing a bit of happiness to my audiences is what continues to inspire me to perform."

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And Dionne is looking forward to sharing the tour with fellow 'legendary' acts. Over the years, she's performed songs by writers such as Isaac Hayes and the Bee Gees and collaborated with Luther Vandross, Michael Jackson, Diana Ross, Ray Charles and more.

"I've had the pleasure of working with some of the most talented artists in our industry, most of which are dear friends. Each of them has brought and given total enhancement to the projects that they participated on and it is impossible to say one was easier to work with or which I took more enjoyment in working with. Above all, each was a consummate professional and very easy to have had the pleasure of working with."

But there is one act that Dionne is yet to work with that she has her heart set on. "I still am hoping that Earth, Wind, and Fire and I will be able to finally get our schedules to coincide. We have been promising to record with each other for years and I do hope it will be soon."

Dionne enjoyed her first hit with Don't Make Me Over, written by Burt Bacharach and Hal David. At that time, she was working predominantly as a backing singer, performing alongside her family as The Drinkard Singers alongside sister Dee Dee and aunt Cissy Houston.

The success she enjoyed with Burt and Hal continued, with the pair penning Walk On By, Anyone Who Had a Heart and the theme from The Valley of the Dolls for the star. Over the course of her career, she's sold more than 100 million records worldwide – quite something for a girl that grew up in New Jersey singing with her family.

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And family issues are something that we wanted to ask about, though we felt a little intrusive doing so. Just a few weeks ago, Dionne’s second cousin Bobbi Kristina Brown died after being found unconscious in a bath tub in her home. Her mother Whitney died in similar circumstances in 2012, and there’s only one thing that has been able to offer Dionne and her family comfort during the trying times.

We ask how she’s keeping things together, and she answers simply: “God,” and leaves it at that.

Family issues aside, it’s been a difficult few years for the singer.

In 2013 Dionne filed for bankruptcy. Where she once worked for seven-figure pay cheques, she found herself in the position where she had only \$1,000 in cash and faced a \$10 million tax debt.

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And in February, Dionne suffered a fall which left her hospitalised. "I am happy to say that I am healing, slowly but surely," she tells us, with again no further details shared.

It's no surprise that she's apprehensive to lay it all on the line with us.

Having her personal life shared with the world in finite detail during the bankruptcy filing was hard, with reporters sharing every detail of each penny of her finances lost with readers in excruciating detail. But, like any star with staying power, it's a challenge that Dionne has faced head on, with the help of what she knows best.

"Life is and will be full of ups and downs. It is something we all have and will go through," she says. "Music is a healing factor and I use mine to do just that."

All over the world, Dionne's singing has been a source of enjoyment for millions of people for five decades. Keen not to pry further, we decide to end our chat on a high note. Of all of the wonderful songs in her repertoire, which is Dionne's favourite to perform?

"I have answered this question so many times!" she says, "and the answer is and will always be the same. All of my songs I treat as my children, and I don't have a favourite child – they are all my favourites!"

- *Dionne Warwick is playing at Birmingham's Barclaycard Arena on October 4 as part of the Legends Live Tour. For tickets visit www.ticketmaster.co.uk*

By Kirsty Bosley

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