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Susanna Hoffs has done a couple of solo records, an album of duets with Matthew Sweet, been part of Austin Powers' backing band, and even starred in a movie -- OK, "The Allnighter" didn't sweep the Academy Awards, but, still, that scene where she sang "Respect" in front of a mirror while wearing nothing but her skivvies really should've won something! But when you get right down to brass tacks, she's best remembered for being a member of The Bangles. The group scored considerable commercial success in the 1980s before slipping quietly into that good night, but they reunited in 2000 for a new album (Doll Revolution) and subsequent tour. Since then, bassist Michael Steele has departed the band's ranks, but Hoffs and the other two Bangles, Debbi and Vicki Peterson, have continued to do live shows. Things have finally slowed down enough for the group that they've been able to release a DVD of one of those original reunion shows -- Return to Bangelonia -- complete with new audio commentary and interviews with the current trio, and Bullz-Eye was fortunate enough to speak with Hoffs about the disc, the band's current status, and even a bit about her non-Bangles work.

Bullz-Eye: Hello?

Susanna Hoffs: Hi, yes, is Will there?

BE: This is he.

SH: Hi, Will! It's Susanna Hoffs calling!

BE: How's it going?

SH: Good! How are you?

BE: Not bad!

SH: Good!

BE: [We actually talked last year](#), when you were doing your press with Matthew.

SH: Oh, that's cool! And that's funny, because I'm just about to get started on Volume 2 of *Under the Covers*, so it's in my mind.



BE: Which actually was going to be another one of my questions. But I guess I'll go ahead and start with my Bangles questions. First off, the DVD's great...

SH: Oh, thank you!

BE: ...but what took it so long to get out? Because it looks like the concert was back in 2000, and unless I misheard during the commentary, I thought I heard someone refer to it as being 2003 when it was being recorded.

SH: Oh, no, no, no. The commentary was just recorded in the [summer](#).

BE: Oh, sorry. I guess I *did* mishear, then.

SH: Yeah, no, that was one of the last things we did, but you know what? It just took a long time. We changed management, *several* times (*laughs*) and finally settled into a situation that's really, really working. And it was on our to-do list, but we had so much stuff going on, between the multi-tasking of family life and Bangle life -- what we call "Bangelonia" -- that it just kept being delayed. But it was just a desire of ours to get that out there in the world, because that moment in time in 2000, when we came back together and started chapter whatever...I don't know if it's 2 or 10...in our career as Bangles, and it was kind of a special moment for us. Michael Steele has since graduated or retired from being a Bangle, at least, so it was special for that reason, too. So, no, the commentary is utterly [fresh](#). Just to clear that up.

BE: So was this something you'd talked about with Shout Factory back when you first started working on your project with Matthew, or did it come up more recently?

SH: No, I kind of fell into the thing with Matthew because...I somehow knew there was interest from Shout Factory. I can't remember who it came from initially, but it was just to talk to me about projects that I wanted to do, so I wasn't sure if it was going to be a solo record or what. That morphed into the *Under the Covers* project, and, additionally, Shout was interested in doing something with The Bangles. So there were many things we were thinking of doing, but one of them was this DVD thing,

which we had had in our minds...or, as I said, on our to-do list...as a wish, and they were very keen to put it out, because they have a division for things like this. They're very good at that. They've put out the "Freaks and Geeks" thing, they did the Dick Cavett thing...they put out these really great DVDs that are sort of collector's pieces for fans. So it was the perfect match, I would say, working with Shout.

"When I was working at my little factory job in the early '80s, and I was listening to oldies radio, which was predominantly '60s stuff back then, I heard 'Hazy Shade of Winter,' and I thought to myself, 'Oh, this is, like, a perfect Bangles song!'"

BE: I couldn't help but notice that, with the concert, you start off by playing three cover songs in a row. Do you just work out the kinks on other people's material so you're primed and ready to go by the time you get to your own songs?

SH: (*laughs*) You know what? I guess I have to admit that doing covers is one of my favorite things. I mean, I guess it's getting to be pretty obvious, and, hopefully, it's not too annoying for people! But when The Bangles first started out, we kind of figured out who we were by what our covers were, and, obviously, we were obsessed with the '60s. When I was working at my little factory job in the early '80s, and I was listening to oldies radio, which was predominantly '60s stuff back then, I heard "Hazy Shade of Winter," and I thought to myself, "Oh, this is, like, a *perfect* Bangles song!" And I knew Vicki would like it, because she was a huge Simon and Garfunkel fan. And it became part of who we were. It just became sort of a template for what we wanted to do. And I've always told young bands, when they ask me stuff about starting out, I always say, "Figure out some covers you want to do." Because it's really a good way to challenge yourself, and, also, to figure out your sound. I know it sounds like the reverse of what you would think, that it'd all be original stuff, but I think -- at least in my case, in my experience -- the cover thing has been important. And this tour we just did was...for whatever reason, we put together a combination of material to play that ended up, without us really doing it intentionally, being kind of a retrospective, including a Mamas and the Papas song which, in some way, defined us so much that we aspired to be a harmony group on top of the garage band thing. That was our little added bonus. We weren't just going to stand there and be a classic folk band, although I [love](#) that kind of stuff.

BE: What Mamas and the Papas song was it?

SH: "Go Where You Want To Go." And in the tradition of, like...did you see the movie "A Mighty Wind?"

BE: Oh, yeah, absolutely! (*laughs*)

SH: Yeah! I loved all that stuff! I mean, when I was really, really, really young, my Mom used to play The Kingston Trio and stuff like that. I mean, it sounds so old-fashioned now, but out of that came...even that folk stuff influenced bands like The Beatles and The Byrds. The Byrds came out of that tradition, too. So it all made sense for us. So doing that song in our set, it kind of was a good thing to add in there. People really sort of got the story, in a way, and I think it worked well.

BE: As far as selecting songs for the set list, obviously, you've got to keep the fans happy by playing the hits, but are there any album tracks that you have considered dragging out that you haven't gotten around to yet?

SH: Oh, for the future?

BE: Yeah.

SH: Yeah, well, there's a lot of stuff from *All Over the Place*, which was our first Columbia record, that, little by little, we've been adding in and adding in and adding in. Because I think that record...I don't know, it's less-known? But, for me, it goes back to the early days of The Bangles, and a lot of the stuff that...like, we started in 1981, but I don't think we made that record 'til (*pauses*) I know we signed to Columbia in '83, but we probably didn't get to recording the record 'til (*pauses again*) I don't necessarily have the [dates](#) exactly, but maybe 1984? But a lot of the songs that ended up on that record were the first songs we ever used to perform in clubs, so it has a special kind of meaning for me, personally, because it reminds me of the early days of the band, before we sort of got thrown in the big bad world (*laughs*) and had to survive the craziness of it all. As things began to go well for us, so begins the pressure cooker, and it's easy to get burnt out and lose track of stuff. So we've been putting a lot of those songs in the set. We play a song called "Tell Me," we do "Hero Takes a Fall," and there are other ones from that era that I'd like to do.

BE: Are there any that just don't work well in a live setting that you've found?

SH: You know...well, from that period, or just in general?

BE: Just in general.

SH: Yeah, there are some songs that sound really good on record that are really, really tricky to do. And I found that out on the song "Something That You Said," which was our single from *Doll Revolution*, which got massive airplay in Europe initially...we started working the record and releasing the record in Europe first..but it was really a hard song to sing, because it's so low. It starts out so low, and it's really hard to sing really low live, because it's just the way the sonics are, and the sound on stage, it's something that's just easier to do in the studio. But there's that song, and there's another song on that record -- and I'm spacing on the name! Oh, God! Debbie sings

it, and it's a total harmony song; it's like an old Beatles-style song. Anyway, that one's really hard to do. The four-part harmony stuff is really somewhat challenging, always, but we've kind of, over the years, figured out a way to kind of master the fact that we are...there's sort of an odd thing, that we're trying to be this loud rock band on stage, and we are a loud rock band on stage, but at the same time, on top of all this noise, we're trying to put these very intricate harmonies. And it *continues* to be a challenge for us, but, somehow, we manage to do it!



BE: Well, I know you closed the set, or came close to closing the set, with a cover of The Seeds' "Pushing Too Hard." Did you feel like you'd come full circle when The Bangles had "Getting Out Of Hand" turn up on the *Children of Nuggets* box set? (Writer's note: Yes, I know, the band was called *The Bangs* at the time, so hold your e-mails.)

SH: Oh, that was so cool! Because, you know, Rhino and Shout Factory are related companies, in a way, and those records were so influential, the '60s ones, all the Nuggets stuff, and especially in the '80s, when I got my hands on those records. Yeah, it was a great honor to be put on that collection.

BE: The acoustic performances are so good that it makes me want to hear a full-length acoustic live album.

SH: Well, me, too! And I think that's something that we're leaning towards. In a way, that's my favorite part of the whole DVD, and I think probably we will go in that direction on this next record. I don't want to say for sure, but we kind of went around and around in pitching ideas, and I think that that's where we're headed.

BE: Actually, I was going to ask about another record, 'cause I know last year you said that some time this year you were hoping for a new record. Is that still in the cards for this year?

SH: Well, I don't know about this year. It's getting harder and harder to get things done in a timely manner because we have, like, split personalities. It's, like, we have our whole family worlds and all the responsibilities that go with that, and then we have our work life, and it becomes (*laughs*) well, the family obviously comes first, but we try to squeeze in The Bangles time when we can! Everything takes longer. Just to get the three of us in a room together, with everybody's schedules, there's too much, everything is so scheduled now. It's too hard to find the time. I don't know why that is.

BE: Reality gets in the way.

SH: Yeah!

BE: And, of course, you mentioned the *three* of you. Michael's not in the band anymore, but in the commentary, it sounded like you were all on good terms. I mean, you said you'd buy her solo album in a heartbeat if she puts one out.

SH: Oh, of course! I'm such a fan of everything she does. She's a really amazing artist, an amazing singer, writer, player and an incredibly creative person, and I would definitely want to hear...I mean, I'm looking forward to hearing whatever it is that she comes up with.

BE: Did she just get tired of the grind?

SH: I think...I think yes. There were aspects of it that were hard for her. I mean, it's hard for me, too, I have to admit. It's hard for me to leave my family. Now that my kids are getting older and more self-sufficient and further along in their school life and everything, it's much easier, but it was very hard when they were babies, and...I don't know. It's definitely something that, the Petersons and I really started the band. Back when the band started, we had a little bit of a revolving door with bass players, although Michael really feels like the *main* bass player.

BE: Yeah, I know you had Annette in the beginning.

SH: We had Annette, and then, briefly, we had a woman named Amanda Podany, who was back in the day, and then came back right after Michael left, right before we got together with Abby, who's been working out really well. Ally Travis. But, anyway (*pauses*) What were we just talking about?

BE: (*laughs*)

SH: Oh, my God! What was your question again?

BE: Well, originally, it was about Michael leaving the band!

SH: Oh, yeah, yeah. But, no, I was talking about how hard it is, and...oh, I know what it was. I was saying that the Petersons and I started the band, and it's somehow easier between Vicki and Debbi and me to figure

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out...somehow, we seem to be able to kind of work in a way that feels OK for the three of us, but it always seemed like there was something with the timing of things or the level of intensity or the level of time spent with the family, some part of the math didn't compute as well for her. And fair enough: she doesn't have kids, so she has more time to really devote to music, and it was probably extremely annoying to her when Back to School Night or something might bring down an entire tour, y'know? (*laughs*) But that's just how it is for us. But I really wish her well.

responsibilities that go with that, and then we have our work life, and...well, the family obviously comes first, but we try to squeeze in The Bangles time when we can!"

BE: And you were talking about the next Sid 'n' Susie album. (Writer's note: that's what Susanna and Matthew Sweet call themselves when they're recording their covers albums.) Have you nailed down the tracks that you're going to record?

SH: You know, we're...it's a constant...it's sort of like what happened with Volume One, where we start out with a list, and every few weeks, either Matthew or I will say, "We should do this one, too!" Or I'll go over to his house, and he'll be sitting there playing something, y'know? So, yeah, we have a good little master list that has the core songs that we've agreed on, and we just have to get to work. We started in the spring, and then all this stuff started happening with The Bangles, and it got put on hold for a second. But, now, I'm home, and I'm starting to get focused.

BE: Can you offer a tease of a couple of the songs you're sure you're going to record?

SH: I'd better not! Because we didn't last time, and I feel like...I'd rather wait just a little bit. But I'll make sure that I keep you in the loop!

BE: OK. I'd appreciate it! (*laughs*)

SH: Oh, sure!

BE: Actually, when we were talking before, you had literally just gotten an e-mail from Mike Nesmith...

SH: (*excitedly*) Oh, yeah!

BE: ...where he was telling you how much he loved the version of "Different Drum" you'd done.

SH: Oh, I was so happy! That made me really happy.

BE: Did you hear from any of the other artists that you covered?

SH: Oh, yeah! We met the guy...and I'm spacing on his name...from The Marmalade when we were in New York and we played "I See the Rain" on "Late Night with Conan O'Brien." And, let's see, who else have I talked to? (*thinks*) It's possible Matthew may have talked to other people related to that project. I can't think of anybody else right now. But, yeah, that was really great meeting him. And I just found out that "Different Drum" is in a new version of "The Heartbreak Kid" that the Farrelly brothers are doing with Ben Stiller. I'd given the album to Pete Farrelly, and he just, I guess, had listened to it all summer while he was working on the movie, and he called and said, "I can't believe it's taken so long for me to call and tell you that this record has been my personal soundtrack!" And nothing makes me happier than to get a call like that, because...I don't know, it's just a thrilling thing! And then I ran into him at...my husband and I went to see Lindsey Buckingham at the House of Blues, and I ran into Peter Farrelly there, and he said, "Yeah, I think I have a place in the movie for 'Different Drum.'" So I was ecstatic. I can't wait to see the movie!



BE: One thing I didn't get to ask you about last time was your solo career. I'm a big fan of both of your solo albums...

SH: Oh, thank you!

BE: ...but while they were really interesting creatively, they never really seemed to take off commercially.

SH: Yeah.

BE: But were they fun to make? It seems like the second one was more...more "you" than the first one.

SH: Oh, definitely. I think the first one was on the heels of The Bangles thing, sort of, and the hugeness of all that...the major label, the big label that I had been on, and I was working with David Kahne, who's very talented. But he was always, like, a guy that was full of ideas and, as I said, very talented, and I loved working with him, but I hadn't really found my own voice yet, I don't think. And I don't mean my singing voice. (*laughs*) I mean my inner voice, my creative voice. And I'm still finding it! And it's just a process. And I do agree with you that the second album was more...me. (*sighs*) That's such a lame way of putting it, though! And I am working on material all the

time, and I've finally given up the idea of, like, trotting out a certain period of time and saying, "This thing will be released on this day." Because I have the luxury of being able to just do things as they happen. So I am working on something, and it's actually with Matthew Sweet, who's co-producing. And he helped me make a matching studio to his, so we can send stuff back and forth to each other, and I can learn how to work on things myself, which will really be liberating, because I've always been sort of at the mercy of other people in recording situations. So I'm looking forward to that, although I'm really not a technical person, and I'm rather impatient with gear and computers and things like that. So there's a learning curve there! But, yeah, I've already started that, and I've been working on songs for *years*, and many of the songs on the last Bangles record were from things that I had originally intended to be for a solo record.

BE: What was it like working with David Baerwald and Mark Linkous (of Sparklehorse) on the second album?

On Michael Steele leaving The Bangles: "(Vicki, Debbi and I) seem to be able to kind of work in a way that feels OK for the three of us, but...some part of the math didn't compute as well for her. And fair enough: she doesn't have kids, so she has more time to really devote to music, and it was probably extremely annoying to her when Back to School Night or something might bring down an entire tour!"

SH: Mark I worked with before David. He was a true artist in every sense of the word. I went out to this farm house that he lived in outside of Richmond, and he would take me to some interesting, inspirational place, like an abandoned schoolyard, or some place that he would go, literally sit under a tree with a guitar and a little cassette player, and we'd write stuff. And, so, it was really great working with him. And I'm kind of sorry that I've lost touch with him. I hope to run into him one of these days. With the internet, I probably could write him an e-mail and find a way to get to him that way. But, anyway, David Baerwald was someone I'd kind of grown up with a little bit, briefly. I knew him because my very first boyfriend was best friends with him. Back in the '70s, just between high school and college, I spent the summer hanging out with the Baerwalds, and...he's a character, another intense artist and intense personality. I really thought he had a great idea in getting a group of talented people, musicians, friends of his together to work with me. I mean, he put together a group of people that was just amazing. And maybe in his mind it was a Tuesday Night Music Club kind of concept. I don't know. But he had been in that group, and it worked well for them. But he was kind of inventing a new version of that, maybe. Or maybe not. But that's what a few people said it reminded them of. But, anyway, it was really fun, and I met some amazing musicians during that time period, so I'm grateful to David for that. Jim Keltner and Greg Leisz, I still play with to this day.

BE: Well, it's been a pleasure talking to you again.

SH: Yeah, you, too! And I'll try to keep you in the loop on the Sid 'n' Susie songs. Sorry I'm being so secretive...

BE: No, no, no, don't worry about it.

SH: ...but not having sat down with Matthew and told him that I'm doing these interviews that are coming up, I just want to make sure that he's cool with it, and that it's the right time to spill the beans. *(laughs)*

BE: Oh, and I did have one follow-up from our last conversation: did you ever ask David Roback about getting that Rainy Day CD reissued?

SH: Oh, you know, it's so annoying, because I went to London with my family, mostly for a vacation -- my husband was working a little bit there this last April -- and David was there, too, and we kept calling each other every day, and we never could figure out a way to hook up. So most of our conversations had to do with, "Well, what about tomorrow at 4? Or what about tomorrow at 6:20?" I mean, it was just so ridiculous. This is what I mean about schedules and life; everything is so scheduled, and then there's never any time for spontaneity! So I didn't get to talk to him about that, but, y'know, I have his e-mail. I'll e-mail him; that's the best way to reach anybody these days. Well, thank you!

BE: No problem. Pleasure talking to you!

SH: You, too! Bye-bye!