

Branigan remembered

Tim Hill

"I WANT to touch people's hearts, to get right down to their souls." Just after the fourth anniversary of her untimely death, Laura Branigan is remembered as one of the pioneering female singers of the 80s and an icon in the gay community.

"Calling Gloria!" belts out a young Laura Branigan, swaying her hips in spandex pants under a revolving mirror ball.

"I look so well fed there!" she chuckles as she watches the music video to her disco anthem, *Gloria*, the up-beat song that launched her career in 1982. The tune spent a record 36 weeks on the Billboard charts and earned her a Grammy Award nomination in early 1983.

So, who was Laura Branigan, and where did she disappear to before her untimely death of a brain aneurysm in August 2004.

After graduating from the Academy of Dramatic Arts in New York, Branigan toured with legendary Leonard Cohen as a backing singer



RIP: Laura Branigan

on the European leg of his world tour. Nineteen-seventy-nine saw her signed by Atlantic Records founder Ahmet Ertegun, but it was only in 1982 that she burst onto the music scene with *Gloria* and her debut record simply entitled *Branigan*.

"I first heard Laura Branigan sing live in my brother Nesuhi's apartment. I immediately realised that she had a great pop voice, in the classical sense," said Ertegun in 2005. "Laura had an instinctive feel for music and melody, and her delivery was sensational."

A year later, in 1983, Laura launched her second album, *Branigan 2*, which produced two hugely successful hits – one being *How Am I Supposed To Live Without You*, written by a then-unknown Michael Bolton, who himself took the song to the top of the charts. The other was *Solitaire*, a remake of a French hit, with lyrics by Diane Warren.

"My manager also managed Laura, so I got in on the ground floor of her career; she was the first artist to sing my songs," said Warren. "I don't know if she was appreciated as much as she should have been."

Next to *Gloria*, the highlight of Laura's career was the song of surrender, *Self Control*, the music video of which was banned by MTV who deemed it too risqué and sexually explicit for television.

The year 1985 brought us *Hold Me*, which included the track *I Found Someone*, later to be covered by Cher, and the up-tempo *Spanish Eddie*. *Touch* came out in 1987 and Branigan was back in the top 20 with a stirring remake of *The Power of Love*, which Celine Dion took to number one six years later.

After *Touch*, there were two more albums and a greatest hits package in 1995, by which time music trends were changing and her powerful four-octave voice went unnoticed.

A small hint of activity was in 1996 when Laura dueted with David Hasselhoff on *I Believe*, a very average song which appeared on the Bay-watch soundtrack.

In between recording albums, Laura tried her hand at acting and starred in two minor features – *Mugsy's Girls* and *Backstage*. Her association with blockbusters was prevalent in the 80s where she contributed to the soundtracks of *Ghostbusters*, *Flashdance* and *Coming to America* – all iconic films of that decade.

Laura had a great affiliation to the gay community and this was echoed in her version of a Spanish track *Mujer Contra Mujer* from her 1993 collection *Over My Heart*.

"The song epitomises the way I feel about gays and how unfair people are who judge them," said Laura in one of her final interviews. "One of the most beautiful lines in the song is 'and who am I to throw stones, 'cos with my stones they'll build a castle around them'. I feel who are we to judge people. We should be true to ourselves."

In the mid 90s Laura took a hiatus from her career and devoted her time to caring for her husband Larry Kruteck, who was diagnosed with colon cancer. He passed away in 1996.

During the late 90s, while Laura was mourning the loss of her husband, she performed only the occasional concert and spent most of her time at home with close friends and family.

Laura had a genuine love for her fans and she rarely concluded a live performance without taking time to greet and sign autographs. Her warmth radiated with words of love and encouragement to the people she affectionately referred to as her "other half".

"When you're on stage, the audience becomes your other half. It's the ultimate high you can reach as a



musician – an incredible feeling. And no matter where I am it's still the same; there's a reason we call music the universal language," Branigan once stated.

Laura returned to the studio in 2001 to begin work on a much-anticipated new album, however an accident set her back – she slipped and fell off a ladder and broke both her femurs. Branigan earned herself rave reviews in 2002 as Janis Joplin in the off-Broadway stage production of *Love, Janis*.

In 2004, two remixes and re-recordings of *Gloria* and *Self Control* hit the clubs and were a sure sign that Branigan was again regaining the presence she once commanded.

Tragedy struck in 2004 when Laura passed away suddenly at her

home in East Quogue, Long Island at the age of 47.

Post her passing, a renewed interest in Branigan's career has become evident, so much so that albums that have been out of print for the best part of a decade have started being re-released.

And as for the new album, Kathy Golik, president of Laura's management company Other Half Entertainment, assures devoted fans that the project hasn't been put on ice. Laura was a perfectionist in every sense and the material in the pipeline will match the standards she always adhered to, so watch this space! To find out more about Laura Branigan, and to purchase her back catalogue, visit the official Laura Branigan website at www.laurabraniganonline.com