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## Columnist Spencer Patterson: Branigan knows value of familiar material

If you're headed to one of Laura Branigan's shows at the Suncoast this weekend, odds are you'll hear a couple of tracks from her upcoming album.

Don't fret. The singer won't play them at the expense of her more familiar material. She can't, if she hopes to exit the stage unscathed at the end of the night.

"I'd get eggs thrown at me if I didn't do 'Self Control,' 'Gloria,' 'How Am I Supposed to Live Without You,'" Branigan said in a recent telephone interview. "They start screaming if I don't sing those songs."

Branigan, 46, is best known for her pop success during the early 1980s, a period that saw her release four Top 20 singles, the aforementioned trio along with "Solitaire."

Backed by a six-piece band, she plays a pair of concerts Saturday and Sunday night at the Suncoast Showroom. Tickets are \$50.50, \$56 and \$62.30 for the performances, both of which are slated to begin at 7:30 p.m.

Ironically, Branigan's highest-charting pop single ever -- 1982's No. 2 hit, "Gloria" -- didn't entirely appeal to the New York native when she initially heard the original, Italian version of the song.

"It wasn't a real American-sounding dance song. It was very European sounding, and it was a hit in non-English-speaking countries in Europe," Branigan said. "My producer brought it to me and I went, 'Hmmm,' because it was so soft and so European sounding.

"But we gave it the American kick and re-wrote the lyrics, and off she went."

Branigan is preparing to release new remixes of "Gloria" and "Self Control" in Europe, and plans to bring them to the U.S. in the coming months.

She is also finishing her first full-length CD since 1993's "Over My Heart." Soon after the release of that album, Branigan put her singing career on hold to care for her husband, Larry Kruteck, who had been diagnosed with colon cancer.

"I just stopped everything to be with him and take care of him and try to find a cure, which I did not," Branigan said.

Kruteck succumbed to the disease in 1996, and Branigan's hiatus from the music scene continued as she mourned his passing. Now she has re-emerged with a new song dedicated to her late husband, titled, "I Know You By Heart."

"It's the most beautiful song you've ever heard. It's about him, and it will rip your heart out," Branigan said.

The song will appear on Branigan's upcoming album, which will be self-released on the singer's in-house label.

"I'm really proud of my new stuff. It's very emotional and it shows off my voice," Branigan said. "I'm always pushing my voice to the edge, and then I kick myself, because then I have to go perform it live every night. But that's kind of what I'm known for."

*Spencer Patterson covers music for the Sun. His music notes column appears Fridays.*