

WHY MADONNA HATED ME

By Bill Lanphier

I used to obsess over whether Madonna liked me. Long after the Virgin Tour ended I'd have a recurring dream. I'd answer the telephone and it would be her.

"Mousse?" (My nickname on the tour.)

"Yes?"

"It's Daisy Miller!" (The alias under which Madonna registered in hotels during the Virgin Tour). "Sorry for all that shit I put you through back then. Let's do another tour together. Make things right."

I don't have that dream anymore. But now, 21 years after the Virgin Tour, this woman is still in the news. Several times a year I'm asked, "What was she like? Did you ever hang out with her? Did you guys get along?"

Sometimes I think she might have liked me. Other times I think not."

She liked me. At the group audition at Leeds rehearsal studios in North Hollywood, Madonna sang a few songs with the prospective band, including myself, that musical director Pat Leonard had assembled. With the exception of an excellent, balding guitarist, Madonna liked us. My hair's okay! I'm going on tour with Madonna!

She hated me. On the first full day of rehearsals, in a misguided effort to connect with Madonna, with whom I had almost nothing in common, I asked her, "How's your buddy?" referring to Rosanna Arquette, star of the movie they'd just completed, "Desperately Seeking Susan," and who had accompanied Madonna to the audition. Madonna's incredulous, "WHAT?" made it clear I had made the monumental mistake of overstepping my boundaries.

She liked me. So, I gave up trying to connect with Madonna, accepting that we were different people and weren't at all likely to become close friends. While the other band members would greet her at each rehearsal with a Hollywoodish hug and upbeat, shallow banter, I laid low. A few weeks into the rehearsals, my mom got sick and I missed a rehearsal. I was surprised that, upon my return the next day, Madonna came right up and, seemingly with genuine concern, asked about my mom. Wow, Madonna likes me (or maybe just my mom).

She hated me. Later, rehearsals moved to a big sound stage at Hollywood Center Studios. As Pat Leonard and I were taking a whiz, he looked over and warned, "Madonna doesn't think you're into the gig and is about ready to can you. I put in a good word, but she's gonna call you tonight. You'd better say the right thing or you're out."

That night, I paced nervously around my sweltering, one-bedroom North Hollywood apartment, practicing what to say. Mid evening, the phone rang.

"So, are you into this or what?"

"Yes! Hi, Madonna! I heard from Pat that you think I'm not into the gig. But I promise you I am. I'll be very animated at the concerts. This is the coolest thing I've ever done!"

"Alright. Just checking." Click.

Whew! My well-rehearsed, ass-kissing saved me, at least for the time being.

She liked me. Some performers often focus on only one instrument and, for Madonna, it seemed to be the bass. During rehearsals, if the guitars, drums, or keyboards missed something, it wasn't that big a deal. But if I missed a single bass note, Madonna would instantly turn around. All the musicians were very solid though and, when the shows began, Madonna seemed confident that everything, including the bass, would always be there. On stage at the opening concert in Seattle, she actually looked over and smiled at me.

She hated me. As far as connecting with Madonna during the performances, stage choreography was the high point for me, albeit terrifying and fleeting. After the tour began and without warning, she decided that it would look cool during one song to maneuver herself behind me,

grab my shoulders and do some kind of dance thingie, presumably with the expectation that I would do something complimentary; I thought that swaying side to side might get it.

But, my eyes glazed over in the bright lights, my robot-like movements botched whatever she was trying to do, and I began perseverating that I'd have a panic attack in front of thousands of people. Despite medicating myself with Valium, my upper lip quivered, my discomfort level rose and, after only a few shows, Madonna wisely axed our "dance routine."

She liked me. At a small restaurant in New Orleans, Madonna amazed us with two, seemingly atypical, observations. First, she slammed everything French in her comments to a Time Magazine editor. A minute later she seemed impressed, (okay, maybe just stupefied) that her panic-stricken bass player had been described by radio personality Dr. Demento as the world's greatest backwards singer.

She hated me. Band members and crew, myself included, made personal snapshots during the tour, and Madonna must have thought I was selling mine to the tabloids. On a mid-tour flight, as I made my way toward the lavatory, Madonna complained, "You take too many photos," and blocked my egress by placing her foot across the aisle. I looked at her foot, looked sadly at the lavatory door, and shuffled back to my seat.

She hated me. At least with the band members, I had become, through deft, anal-retentive recon, the go-to guy for finding interesting neighborhoods in which to hang out during the tour. In Chicago, my home town for 20 years, Madonna asked me to recommend a good ethnic restaurant. I suggested Standard India, then on Devon Avenue on the near north side. After eating too much rich, spicy food, Madonna got sick and could barely perform the next night.

She liked me. As the tour progressed, I had taken to slathering more and more styling gel onto my hair before we went on, simply for the stupidity of it, and earned the moniker, "Mousse." Concurrently, immediately before going onstage each night, the band and dancers, under Madonna's direction, chanted (rhythmically and lyrically in the style of some rap song): The Mousse, the Mousse, the Mousse is on fire. Somebody get some water put the mother fucker out. We came to make 'em scream, we came to make 'em shout. We came to do one thing and that's to make his hair stand out."

Imagine that. Madonna and the band, rapping about my coiffure.

She hated me. The "Mousse is on Fire" pre-concert pep rally continued until the eight-week tour ended. At the wrap party at a trendy restaurant in Manhattan, Madonna, expressionless and without provocation or comment, tossed a glass of water into my lap and walked away. No one seemed to know what to make of it, and that part of the room fell silent.

For several years I did my best to put a positive spin on this. "Sure! Madonna symbolically capping a wonderful tour and putting out the fire! Madonna! What a character!"

Now, though, as I look back over the "likes" (45 percent) versus "hates" (55 percent), I accept the reality of the situation. Madonna really, really hated me. On second thought, on the remote chance she does remember any of this, she certainly doesn't give a shit about me one way or another. But, it is fun to imagine that she harbors just a hint of smoldering hatred.