



AN INTERVIEW WITH ...

Ellen Foley

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Singer-actress Ellen Foley has been active for over four decades now, and shows no signs of slowing down. The healthy and youthful 65 year old lady still has an extremely powerful, awesome voice, and can belt out a tune as if she's just turning on the stove. Impressive, most impressive. In August 2016, miss Foley performed at the Vostertfeesten in Bree, Belgium, and we were granted the honour to ask her some questions. But first, the pleasantries.

Julian De Backer: 'Miss Foley, welcome to Belgium. How are you today?'

Ellen Foley: 'Very well, thank you. It's so beautiful today. So far. I came over to do this show, just for this. I'm familiar with Belgium. I've spent time here in the 80's. Two years ago, I did a month tour around Belgium and Holland.'

Julian: 'Your latest album, 'About Time', from 2013 is excellent. It saddens me that it went by so unnoticed. Not a lot of people heard the songs.'

Ellen: 'I guess not. That's the way it goes. But I'm still performing some of the songs. They live on, in live performances.'

Julian: 'Your voice is as strong as ever. You didn't age at all, voice-wise.'

Ellen: 'Thank you. I work pretty hard in anticipation of a tour. The last couple of months, I've been working with my voice teacher, vocalizing every day. My voice is my instrument, and it's not as malleable as it once was. I'm not 20 years old, so I can't jump on stage and sing all these high notes. You have to strengthen the muscles, and I have to work hard to do that. It's a complete exercise. But thank you.'

Julian: 'I love the line: 'It was bad when it started/then it just got worse' from 'Carry On (Party's Over)'. Does that lyric hold some truth to you?'

Ellen: 'It's just a throwaway rock 'n roll song, talking about somebody's experience. Not mine necessarily, because I have a charmed, very nice life. Maybe the guy who wrote it, Paul Foglino, feels that way about his life. Haha! But I like singing it: interpreting a lyric, rather than having it reflect what's going on in your life.'

Julian: 'A 24-year old girl, who's a personal friend of mine, didn't know 'Ellen Foley' when I

told her I would be interviewing you. I then sent her the YouTube-link for 'We Belong To The Night', and she was floored by your voice. 'Wow', she said, 'what a truly excellent song'. It's a song that easily impresses multiple generations. It's an evergreen.'

Ellen: 'Good! That's why I love coming to Belgium, because there's an appreciation. I'll be playing 'What's a Matter Baby (Is It Hurting You)', 'Stupid Girl', 'We Belong To The Night', all from my first album.'

Julian: '35+ years on. These songs just don't age. They're timeless.'

Ellen: 'Yeah! They weren't part of any kind of fad. They had to be anything. The production values were Phil Spector-esque. Nobody gets bored of that. It lives on. Some people – who are smart – still use that kind of production, and the audience loves it.'

Julian: 'The outfit you're wearing in that particular clip – a glittery stylish number – is very 80's, but you could still wear it today. It's hip again.'

Ellen: 'Yes! I never wore big trends or fads, or 80's hair. I had my own version of big 80's hair, haha, but I never looked too much like the 80's.'

Julian: 'And you're still super svelte today. You have, how shall I say it ...'

Ellen: 'I've maintained?'

Julian: 'You've maintained!'

Ellen: 'Thank you very much. And I'm doing this interview without any make-up, which is very brave. (to Alfons, photographer and CEO of Keys and Chords) Maybe take some before and after pictures, will you?'

Julian: 'I've never had the pleasure to see you live, so I'm here, in Bree, to see you.'

Ellen: 'Oh, thank you. I have a really excellent band here, with Belgian musicians.'

Julian: 'The song 'Madness' from your latest album sounds a little like 'Fever', the famous Little Willie John composition also covered by Elvis and Peggy Lee, amongst others.'

Ellen: 'Indeed, it's got that sneaky, snaky, I-hate-jazz-but-almost-jazzy kind of feeling. That record let me explore more than just the rock 'n roll and the pounding. There's poppy stuff, there's a nice ballad, and 'Madness' is a kind of song I never did.'

Julian: 'Especially for you, a woman with pipes ...'

Ellen: 'To be able to pull back, absolutely. You have to have different levels and dynamics.'

Julian: 'You hail from St. Louis, Missouri. We hear a lot about America in the news, but St. Louis is never really a focus of attention. What do you remember about it?'

Ellen: 'I only lived there in my youth. I came to New York when I was 21. I came of age in another state. Sometimes, I go back to Missouri. I still have family over there.'

Julian: 'I researched the local cuisine from St. Louis. There's the 'Gerber Sandwich', and the 'St. Paul Sandwich'. Are these familiar to you?'

Ellen: 'These might be more recent things. I have no idea.'

Julian: 'Perhaps the 'Goosey Butter Cake'?'

Ellen: 'Ooh, I'm gonna go back for that! That sounds good! The food I remember the most was from a place called 'Steak and Shake', which is a hamburger place. When I was a kid, it was a literal drive-in. You would sit in your car, and you would have a tray up here. Girls would come out with roller skates.'

Julian: 'Great, just like in the movies. American Graffiti!'

Ellen: 'American Graffiti, that's right! Burgers, fries, shakes, and then something that was specific to St. Louis: they used to have fried ravioli. You know what ravioli is? They throw it in a deep fryer. Oh my God, I had never seen it anywhere else! Very fattening. But I was a kid, so nobody cared. People nowadays tend to be quite large in America. We have an unhealthy population, I'm afraid.'

Julian: 'The father of a friend of mine is living and working in New York, and he told me there's something called 'the sugar mafia'. They add sugar to everything.'

Ellen: 'Yes, sugar and fat. And some people just eat the wrong food, the stuff that's worse for you. New York City, however, is more like parts of Europe. People are much thinner. Obama created Obama Care, but the Republicans hate Obama Care, because they support the pharmaceutical companies. But unhealthy people really need Obama Care. Michelle Obama has been actively campaigning to get people to move and eat well.'

Julian: 'We'll see if their efforts have any lasting effects.'

Ellen: 'I hope so. Her big thing was childhood obesity, so maybe she can get them to at least start living a healthy life. Children are no lost causes.'

Julian: 'School cafeterias have a long way to go.'

Ellen: 'There are changes now. Small steps, but they are steps.'

Julian: 'Speaking of burger places, have you ever visited the 'Shake Shack' in New York City?'

Ellen: 'I've never been to 'Shake Shack'.'

Julian: 'I've been there in 2012, and there was a 45-minute waiting line. Every day.'

Ellen: 'See, that's it. I don't want to stand in line! Haha.'

Julian: 'It's worth it, though.'

Ellen: 'So they say. You're making me so hungry. I better get some food soon.'

Julian: 'You've always combined singing and acting. Was this the plan from the start, or did you just roll into the combination?'

Ellen: 'I think I knew I wanted to be a performer. When I was a kid, I knew I could sing. I started to just ... yeah, I guess I rolled into it, to a degree. Then again, no, because I worked and I studied. Maybe I didn't know exactly which road I wanted to take. When I went to New York, I was in a band, but at the same time, I was studying acting. It all rolled together.'

Julian: 'Internet rumour has it that you will be featured on the new Meat Loaf album. Is that true?'

Ellen: 'Yes! There's a song called 'Braver Than We Are', and both Karla DeVito and I sing on it.'

Julian: 'That's great. Almost 40 years after 'Bat Out Of Hell', you're reunited.'

Ellen: 'It's a very historical little piece of music.'

Julian: 'I'm looking forward to it. Jim Steinman is one of my favourite songwriters of all time. He's a genius.'

Ellen: 'Yeah, he wrote all the songs on the new album.'

Julian: 'So exciting to have a new collaboration, the first complete project they're doing together since 1993's 'Bat Out Of Hell II: Back Into Hell'. Plus, you and Karla DeVito!'

Ellen: 'It is. Karla's such a great girl. I didn't know her all that well, but we recorded our parts in Nashville, and we spent time together. She's great, so sweet. She's one of those really nice people. (subtle pause) Not like me! Haha. I'm nice, but not to the degree that she is.'

Julian: 'You've been very nice to us today. Thank you, and we're looking forward to the show today.'

Ellen: 'Thank you. Take some pictures with the make-up!'

Julian De Backer

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