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Brightman ventures into a 'Harem'

The versatile soprano puts out an album inspired by the Middle East.

By **STACY DAVIES SPECIAL TO THE REGISTER**

Ever since soprano Sarah Brightman made a critically acclaimed splash in then-husband Andrew Lloyd Weber's "Phantom of the Opera," she's been called "The Angel of Music" by her fans. It may seem like an obvious moniker, and a bit cliché, until one looks at the breadth of Brightman's career, which began long before "Phantom" – a project she refers to as a minute but important portion of her accomplishments.

Since then, this Brit with the powerful vocal cords and sweetly innocent speaking voice has spanned the musical spectrum, culminating, at least for now, with her latest album, "Harem." Her current tour brings her Sunday to Arrowhead Pond of Anaheim. She spoke by phone last week during a tour stop in Reno.

Q. When you were a girl, you were really known as a dancer. Then, they say, one day you opened up your mouth, and that voice came out.

A. It wasn't really as dramatic as that! As a girl, my ear was always tuned to classical music and the classical style of singing. I had recordings of Joan Sutherland and other people like that, and I found at a very young age that I could actually follow along with some of the credenzas quite easily – I had no trouble reaching those. I was very musical in that respect, and it naturally developed. At the same time, I've enjoyed careers in other styles. But the basis of my voice is a classical sound.

Q. You went on to dance and sing in some hit shows in the U.K. Then you released the chart-topping disco song "I Lost My Heart to a Starship Trooper." What happened there?

A. (Laughs) That was my first recording! You know, when you're a teenager you're experimenting and working with lots of different people and you're ambitious and you're trying to stick out, and I think it came from there. It was a fun time. It was an experimental time. But you know what, it's still my voice. I listen to that record now and the voice could be the same voice that's on the most current album. I've never really veered off from my sound. All I've really done is work in different genres.

Q. You certainly have. You had the folk-rock album, "As I Came of Age ... "; you've sung Rogers and Hammerstein, operatic numbers in "Phantom," Queen's "Who Wants to Live Forever" and a duet with Tom Jones. Where does the spark for these new directions come from?

A. I don't really calculate it. I'll come across an idea, perhaps, but the timing isn't right, so I won't go further with it. And then later, the time is right, and I go, "Oh my god, that's perfect for now!" It's very natural. It's like people who paint, artists, they can never tell you why things happen. It's something that came before, something that's happening now – it all meets. It's instinct, I suppose.

Q. "Harem" is a sort of East-meets-West dramatic fantasy with a decidedly Middle Eastern theme – "The War is Over" features Iraqi vocalist Kadim Al Sahir; the East Indian "The Journey Home" is by Bollywood composer A.R. Rahman; and there's the danceable techno title track, "Harem," which means "forbidden places" in Arabic. Considering the state of the world these days, is this a danceable "message" album?

A. Really since 1994 – although not much in America – I've had pop-type songs end up on the charts, and I've always enjoyed "dance" music, whether it's in the techno stage or the disco stage. I've been on the continent for a long time now, mostly in Germany, and there's a huge club culture there, so that was a current influence to do more techno or dance music. When I started this album, what happened in America hadn't happened yet, however. But the Middle Eastern theme – I think it's that I've always lived near these countries where there's always been a problem. We're closer to it over here, so we're aware of it, much more than Americans. These countries around us really play a daily part in our lives, and these stories and cultures have always been there. I guess they just all came to a head now in this album.

Q. You do so many things and have crossed into so many areas. Sometimes critics and the public can be very tough on multitalented people – they don't like people who can do everything.

A. Well, I can't do everything. But I think if they're not artists themselves, they don't understand that just because you're working in

one type of genre, that doesn't mean other things aren't going on in your head. You're evolving into the next thing. People do that in their daily lives – you evolve slowly and one day things are different, and it may seem like it just happened overnight, but really, you've spent a lot of time getting to that next place.

Q. Probably everyone gets those evolving messages, and some people just aren't as receptive to them. But you seem to be receptive to all of your messages. That can turn you into a workaholic, can't it?

A. (Laughs) So my mother tells me! I'm not very good on holidays, I have to say. But probably if I were made to sit somewhere long enough I'd get into it. I enjoy what I do. And I do think there's a lack of time. But you can run around doing a lot of things and actually get not a lot done.

So sometimes it's best to take it more slowly. I do enjoy each moment. I try to make the best of my life and do as much as I can.

Q. Would you like to do another musical?

A. No! (Laughs) But I'll probably end up doing one at some point – but not at the moment.

Q. We'll make you eat your words.

A. I'm sure you will!

Sarah Brightman

Where: Arrowhead Pond of Anaheim, 2695 E. Katella Ave. **When:** 7:30 p.m. Sunday **How much:** \$55-\$ 1 25 **Call:** (7 1 4) 740-2000 **Online:** www.ticketmaster.com



SARAH BRIGHTMAN: The British soprano has an appearance Sunday at the Arrowhead Pond.