



We're very happy to have some time today with acclaimed crooner Gary Driscoll; greetings and salutations Gary and welcome to Vents Magazine! Before we Lindy Hop down the proverbial Q&A musical pathway, how is the latter-half of 2024 finding you and yours?

Yeah, thanks mate, it's good to speak with you on Vents...

2024 has been quite busy for me to be truthful. I sing a couple of nights a week with lots of bookings for parties, anniversaries, book launches that sort of thing. Trying to balance those with family life and still enjoy the odd holiday with Maria, I ain't been sitting around anyway.

Major kudos and accolades on your freshly-minted new single *The Black Widow!* Starting at the top, can you talk about what inspired tunesmith Mark Leen to write and compose this song and what inspired you to record this gem of a ditty?

It all started when I appeared on The Hairy Bikers TV show a few years back. They were doing a tour of the Pubs that built Britain and they came to the east end of London. I had been performing down around there for several years and one of the governors asked me to sing for a funeral wake. I said do they seriously want a crooner at a wake? Is it anybody I know? and he said "Yeah, Reggie Krays"

So, I had a think about it and said, ok let's do it. I went along and the whole place was packed with gangsters I would say.

The Hairy Bikers BBC producers heard this story and asked me to appear on their having a pint and singing a song at The Carpenters Arms. Meanwhile in Co Kerry in Southern Ireland this geezer I never heard of -Mark Leen, was watching the whole thing. It was broadcast in the middle of the day and he was out cutting his lawn and came in for a break and flicked on the telly. Just at that moment, I was telling my story and it so happened that he caught it. Mark contacted me on Facebook straight away and said to me "would you let me write a song for you?" and I said "do what? You're 'Avin a laugh"

I really thought-oh here we go, but then he sent me a Christmas song he had written and sung on and it was fabulous. It was big band and right up my alley. So, I said, ok go on then write one, and the rest is history. He wrote The Old East End Tonight in two hours and sent it back

to me. I made a couple of suggestions and tweaks from knowing the area and we both got very interested in completing the arrangement. It's like a British Mac the Knife really. I'm so glad he got in touch; I made a great friend and it changed my career for the better to be truthful. We went to Belfast together and recorded that first song at Red Box Studios with a huge big band and it was arranged by Paul Campbell. I asked Mark to write a song for Linda Calvey as it was clear Linda liked my performances and the music I. Was doing.

Who did the producing honours on *The Black Widow* single and what did the in-studio collaboration between artist and producer look like while fashioning and shaping this tune?

Well, I suppose I get the tunes from Mark at an advanced stage. He gives me the song and a backing track. Then I have a listen and bring it to my local studio as a demo and I sing to it to see how it fits with my voice. We bring in the orchestrator to get the score done and then replace the demo Mark sends with a real live big band. Very few acts use big bands anymore and it's sad really. I had done a number of East End functions for old school get togethers "laugh" and I find they like that sort of thing, My Way, Matt Monro, dressed to the nines in a proper tux etc. At a lot of these events, I got to know the likes of Fred Foreman (Brown Bread Fred) and Linda Calvey (The Black Widow) and many others with "shall we say" an interesting history. She liked my singing and the songs I was doing and she asked me to sing for her book launches and various charity events. So, we got to know each other really well. She loved The Old East End Tonight and so I asked Mark if he would write something for Lady Linda. I didn't hear from him for a couple of days and then he came back to me with this cracker of a tune complete with words and music. It was nothing like what I expected but I love it now. He knows my style of performing and he imagines me singing the songs in his mind which is a big help. He knows my range very well and it's like a match made in heaven really. He even flew into London for the recording session and it's great having him in studio with us. He writes the songs and so he will say "no, sing that bit this way Gary" or can we take a couple of seconds off that instrumental. He has a real nose for what works musically speaking and has years of studio experience. I believe his home town in Ireland had a regular jazz session every week where he would get up and sing and play clarinet and sax, so he cut his chops there and he's obviously been around the block. Mick Hutchings is my local studio engineer and he is a big part of the process for me and extremely helpful at bringing the best out in my voice. He assists me in hunting down the end result.

Can you introduce our ever-inquisitive readers to some of the talented musical gremlins who lend their own indelible skills to provide the glorious Big Band sounds to *The Black Widow*?

Well, it was as I've said; written and composed by Mark Leen. The song features my vocals, inadvertently earning me the title of the "Crooner of Crime." I was backed by The Stretchy Legs Big Band, with standout performances from Jake Heath on sax, Seb Skelly on trumpet, piano, and double bass, and James Burton on drums. The Black Widow song brings Linda's gripping tale to life. Recorded by Mick Hutchings of The Soundworks and mastered by Aidan Foley at Masterlabs. The single showcases a distinct blend of storytelling and jazz.

In your humble opinion what differentiates *The Black Widow* from the Distinguished Competition on the 2024 music scene?

To begin I would say I'm not 19 or 20 "laughs" no but seriously, it's the big band. The song is about a real person which is always tricky to do. It doesn't use any modern technology to accomplish the overall sound and it's in your face. The instruments are real and the musicians are reading a score for a couple of weeks and then when it comes to the recording session it's got to swing properly. There's surprisingly a lot of young people playing on these songs who have learned real brass and reed instruments and strings etc. I would like to add that these Crime songs have even been re-mixed by the likes of DJ Blackk Habbit and others reaching a whole new younger dance audience as far away as Ibiza. I believe there are not too many crooners still on the go so I do seem to get a lot of that work.

In the wake of the release of the new *The Black Widow* single, can fans look forward to a possible EP or LP release from you in the not-too distant future?

Yes, that idea has been bandied about. It isn't easy when you don't have a big label publishing your music, so we have to pay for everything but thankfully people seem to like what we do. We have *The Old East End Tonight* which featured in the gangster movie *Rise of The Footsoldier 3*. *Brown Bread Fred* and now *The Black Widow* which are being well received and we are already eyeing up the next one. A number of colourful individuals have already approached me wanting their own song. "Laughs" Yes though, I can definitely see a *Crooner of Crime* compilation release in 2025.

What does your touring/performing dance card look like in the coming weeks and months?

Oh mate, up the bloody walls. I've got Christmas parties, New Years, private events in the diary. I sing on a London Gangster Tour Bus in the early evenings and there are theatre shows touring the UK with Fred Dineage by night with me on a big screen singing at the start of each performance. So, I have to literally mark nights out in my diary to be able to stay in and enjoy the holidays.

Who are some of the music artists who have influenced and inspired your own indelible musical stylings?

Well, I'd have to say Matt Monro, his songs always sit well with my voice. Sinatra of course, nobody could phrase a lyric like *Ol Blue Eyes*.

I loved Joe Longthorne because he put 100% into everything, and to be fair Mark Leen has influenced the stylings and presentation of this new material.

How is the new single similar to some of your past music such as the recent *Brown Bread Fred*? How is it different?

Well, the songs are written by the same guy but they are surprisingly different. He plays them like a movieographer in his head. So, for example *Brown Bread Fred* had a mandolin and Mediterranean costa del crime sort of feel, while still being very melodic returning to the chorus a few times. *The Black Widow* however is a song where you don't really know where I'm gonna take it next because it doesn't have the traditional verse, chorus, verse, bridge composition. I would say the songs are like stories put to music, and while they are certainly tongue in cheek, they are factually based and grounded in the British Crime history of a certain era.

At the end of the day, what do you hope listeners walk away with after giving many-a-spin to your beautiful new single *The Black Widow*?

I would hope they enjoy the couple of minutes they are listening to it and that they would maybe identify some of the influences that are in the tune. From Benny Goodman to Bobby Darin, and then maybe explore some of the other songs in the series. People can find me on social media or YouTube, just look for Gary Driscoll. I would love to hear some feedback. The last word on this must go to Linda Calvey, she loves the song and has strongly endorsed it. That meant the world to yours truly, and I hope audiences like it too.

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