

WOMAN'S

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DIANA ROSS
MOTHER OF FIVE
BARES HER SOUL

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SLEEPING
IN MY BED?**
THE WIFE AND THE
EX-WIFE AT WAR

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BRIGHTEST
FASHION EVER**

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PRINCESS MICHAEL?**
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AN EXCLUSIVE OFFER



WIN
**A DREAM HOLIDAY
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Supreme Being

She shall have Rolls-Royces wherever she goes. Caroline Phillips meets Diana Ross, Queen of Soul

Diana Ross is the woman that John Major said he'd like to take to his desert island. Originally lead singer in the Supremes—which became the biggest selling female group of all time—she has had hit records from *Baby Love* to *Endless Love* and received an Academy Award nomination for her first film role as the jazz

singer Billie Holiday in *Lady Sings the Blues*. She's currently negotiating with Mohamed Al Fayed about an exclusive Harrods fashion range, to be designed by herself.

Earlier this year she released her 58th album, *The Force Behind the Power*, specially written for her and arranged by Stevie Wonder, a friend of Diana's since he was nine years old, though she says they don't spend much time together these days. 'I like the album very much,' she hoots with laughter, but her voice is delicate and mellifluous. 'It's my very best work to date.'

'It was quite a chore working with him but a lovely chore because he's great to work with. He's a genius and a fanatic about detail who takes very long to do the work. The album was held up for two months because of him.'

Yet despite all her achievements, the Press has gone off the First Lady of Soul in recent years, recasting her as Ross the Boss, the Motown Matron and the Queen Mother of Soul. Known for her mercurial temper, she's seen as a prima donna of troublesome proportions. It is reported that she imperiously demands respect, decreeing that she should be called Miss Ross by her staff. She's said to have fired 42 secretaries; and she's reputed to require a fleet of chauffeured Rolls-Royces wherever she goes.

At The Dorchester, where she stayed during a recent visit to London, Ross is at pains to point out that these are The Diana Ross Myths. 'I find it exhausting just defending myself,' she says. 'Having to prove who I am.'

Actress, recording artist, producer, writer and businesswoman who manages herself through Diana Ross Enterprises Inc, Ross has set up her own film production company, owns her own record label and is a partner in Motown Records. She has enjoyed three decades as a star.

In the 1980s Ross' career wilted. Her last album, *Workin' Overtime*, only sold 150,000 copies (while Whitney Houston's last album sold two million). 'Oh my career's up and down. It's just that kind of career really,' she says, sounding tired. Is she making a comeback? 'I don't think I ever went away.'

She manages her career, organises her business interests, runs her household and takes care of her children. Some people call her driven, and certainly she is determined and energetic. Marvin Gaye said she was made of steel; and she proves to be as hard as nails.

While wanting to appear confidential



(she has a slightly theatrical sort of sincerity), she actually keeps you at arm's length and there's something rather slippery about her. 'I don't mean to. If anything I feel I'm much too open in interviews. I think about it afterwards and wonder why some questions are so important. People write too much about celebrities' personal lives. I don't like it because it often gets misunderstood.' But 30 years of living in the spotlight has taught her to deflect awkward questions. Ross is five foot five and wearing a purple mid-thigh coat dress over black woollen leggings and above-the-knee black suede boots, looking casual and relaxed. She has a shapely figure considering her 48 years and five children, and an insincere way of

throwing her head back and smiling that she appears to have learnt in charm school.

In November 1991 rumours that her marriage was in trouble hit the Press. She dismisses the gossip as rubbish. 'Such rumours might cause my marriage to be troubled, if anything. I have no trouble with the marriage. It's just that we're not together all the time.'

So what of her love life? In the 1960s, Berry Gordy was the Motown Svengali who loved Ross and orchestrated her rise. They never married, and she left him in 1970 for the LA press agent Robert Silberstein. (Ross later announced that her first-born, Rhonda, was actually Gordy's child.) In the mid-Seventies she got restless, divorcing Silberstein in 1976. In 1985, while on holiday in the Bahamas, she met Norwegian shipping millionaire Arne Naess. She married him nine months later.

Naess, keen on trees, mountains and nature, is an avid mountaineer who climbed to the summit of Mount Everest in 1985, having taken seven years to accomplish the goal. 'At the beginning of their relationship they found it fascinating that they had come from such different backgrounds,' Randy Taraborrelli, author of the 1989 best-selling unauthorised biography *Call Her Miss Ross*, has said. 'But as much as Diana climbed mountains with Arne and went on safari with him, that is not the real Diana. She is a high-flying city girl who has always aspired to the glamorous life.'

How does she manage her transcontinental marriage? 'We spend about half the year together. I see him every month. We're still managing,' says Ross. Giggle, giggle, giggle. Naess is a shipping broker who likes to spend much of his time living and working in London; Ross, on the other hand, prefers America. 'It's difficult living in different places, but that's because of the kind of careers we both have. I think I'm mature and

understanding enough for it to be OK. I've always been independent and I don't mind being alone the times we're not together. 'I care a lot about him, and I think he cares about me. The romance is still in the relationship because we're not together all the time. When we come together, it's very special.' Ross was recently reported to be devastated when her husband was asked to surrender his membership of a supposedly chic Long Island club because his wife is black. And she gets angry when asked about her experience of racial tension and discrimination. How does she feel about being coloured? 'I'm not coloured,' she says, getting heated and sitting upright, her voice full of *hauteur*. Her anger covers her insecurity. 'I don't wanna talk about it. I don't look at you as a white interviewer. I don't ask you how difficult it is to be white and a journalist. I don't need to point that out or make that distinction. I think we do it a little bit too much. We should identify people by their qualities, not the colour of their skin.' Ross, dreaming the American Dream, believes the only truly liberated perspective is a colour-blind one. We talk about her childhood. Ross was the second eldest of six children. (Two siblings have also gone into showbiz.) Her mother was a 'homemaker', and her father, a foreman in the American Brass factory, did two jobs to support the family. Her maternal aunt lived with them in their Detroit home helping out. It was a good, warm family life, she says, and a Baptist church-going one.

Her home has always been reported as having been a ghetto. 'Other people have described my home life that way. I wouldn't,' she says, sharply. She hates to be reminded of her humble Detroit origins. 'We lived in a poor neighbourhood. But when I say "poor", I mean poor in dollars, not in relationships, love or caring. If I needed a dime or a piece of candy, I always seemed to have it.' She started working aged 16. Fame came early and she never had a chance to make her mistakes in private. 'I think a lot of young performers find it hard adjusting to this kind of lifestyle and having normality in their lives. To go from nothing to something is a balancing act. I've managed,' she says, with defiance in her voice.

Her lifestyle has changed drastically since those early days. She now drives a black convertible Rolls-Royce and lives in a beautiful old house in Greenwich, Connecticut. 'It's always falling apart. The heating or plumbing or something's always going wrong. I have more workmen in the house than family!' She also has a house in California, and Naess has a flat in London and a chalet in Switzerland. 'I like being away from the city. I like the calm and peace of the countryside, the trees and grass.'

Ross lives simply. 'I wear my old slippers and bathrobe and get up at seven with my children. When they go to bed at eight thirty, I'm in bed soon after. If she's recording, she begins after the children are in bed. 'So I don't start until nine thirty or 10 at night.' That can make it a long day, so she naps in the back of her chauffeur-driven car when she's travelling.

Her personal fortune has been estimated at \$75 million. 'Gee, I don't know what I'm worth. Money's important to make sure my

kids' education is paid for, that we have a wonderful home that's not going to be taken away from us for any reason, and to make sure I am secure enough for retirement,' she says, sounding curiously like a girl with humble roots.

The lady in the bathrobe and carpet slippers is also a friend of Michael Jackson. It is even said that he modelled his face on hers. ('Diana Ross does not have a close relationship with Michael Jackson, partly due to her own inflated sense of celebrity,' Taraborrelli has said. 'She's not the most giving person in the world, either.') 'I haven't seen Michael in six months. In the early days, I was his mentor, there to talk to him about the things that worried him or concerned him. We don't spend as much time talking personally as we did when he first started out.'

Surprisingly, Ross sees herself, above all, as a mother and wife. 'My family, my children are my priority. My career works its way round that.' She says she could give up her career and become a family woman. 'Absolutely. I'm considering it all the time.'

Her children range in age from three to 20, and she usually travels with her two small sons, Ross and Evan, who were born just 10 months apart, the youngest when she was 45. One can imagine her being a loving mother. 'I've never been away from the boys for more than a week.' Rhonda, 20, and Tracee, 19, are students at Brown University in California, while 16-year-old Chudnee is at school in Connecticut.

'I'm much more aware of my responsibilities as a parent, and much more patient now. I probably have less energy as far as running and playing goes, but I am still fairly fit. To keep up with a three year old for a long time is really quite something.' I think of the punishing tour schedule ahead of her. 'The main difference is that when the girls were little, my mother was alive and she was always with me when I travelled.'

She misses her mother deeply. 'We were very close. I miss her so much. She set the standard of parenthood for me, showed me how mothers should be. Every time I pass by a mirror, I see my mother's face. I think I look a lot like her and I hear myself saying things that sound very like her when I talk to my children. She was really quite a foundation for me.'

It is said that Ross lives by something she once heard that President Roosevelt said. 'You have nothing to fear but fear itself.' She even wrote it in eyebrow pencil on her dressing-room mirror. In person, the impression she gives is of someone independent, capable, efficient and confident; a woman who is very positive and a force to be reckoned with. She is also stunningly humourless.

In the mid-Seventies, keen on self-improvement, she embarked on Erhard Seminars Training (EST), a

Californian philosophy based on self-determination and self-realisation. 'EST was about taking charge of yourself, rather than being vulnerable and at other people's mercy. About driving the train rather than being a passenger. I remember coming out of there and feeling good about myself and liking myself a lot.' Does she like herself now? 'Yes [B-movie sigh] very much.'

Soon after EST, she took a trip to India, visited gurus and started reading the Bible. But her appetite for self-realisation was very limited. 'I don't want to over-analyse myself and why I've become who I am,' she said recently. 'That's like winning on the stock market and then taking classes on it, you know?'

And yet she was once quoted as saying: 'I can't relax. I have to be better than the rest, super everything, and I'm nervous. And I'll probably be insecure until the day I die.' She has also said she was insecure because she didn't go to college and that she felt she'd missed something and 'wasn't as smart as everybody else'. 'I never said any of that,' she says now, her voice rising. 'It's not true. I may have said that I like to stay busy. I'm not a couch potato. But I think I have most of my insecurities handled now.'

So how would she describe herself then? 'Oh my,' she giggles, and then tells me how responsible she is for her children. She says she can't figure out what else to say to me. Well, is she funny, or intelligent? 'The answer to both those is "no".' (Laughs.) 'I think I'm smart in so much as I've been able to learn the things that it was necessary to know.' And does she think she has a great temper? 'No,' she says, in a subdued voice.

The publicity man comes in. 'I think Miss Ross needs to freshen up now,' he says—putting one in mind of all The, er, Diana Ross Myths. The Queen Mother of Soul, every inch the diva, takes her leave with an artificial laugh. She has arrived late and leaves early. It seems odd since she is only staying in the room next door. □
Diana Ross' June UK tour dates are: Dublin (2nd); Belfast (3rd); Birmingham (5th); London (7th, 8th); Glasgow (10th)



Endless love:
Diana Ross with Arne Naess (far left); with her daughters (above and below); and (bottom) with Supremes Mary Wilson (left) and Florence Ballard



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'The romance is still in the relationship because we're not together all the time. When we come together, it's very special'

