





Selling Love

DIANE WARREN has written every sappy song you've ever sung in the shower, yet she's never been in love. What gives?

BY ARIANNE COHEN PHOTOGRAPHED BY PETER YANG

THE DAY BEFORE my interview with Diane Warren, I call her assistant, but Warren herself picks up: "Yes, this is Diane because there's no one in my fucking office to pick up the fucking phone. Twelve people work here, and no one is here. This is fucking insane. Shouldn't they be here?" She laughs.

Meet Diane Warren, the world's premier writer of chart-topping love songs. You know her well: She helped you through your first breakup (Exposé's "I'll Never Get Over You Getting Over Me"). You car-sang her lyrics (Cher's "If I Could Turn Back Time"), slow-danced to her melodies (Celine Dion's "Because You Loved Me"), and perfected your karaoke skills to her catchy hits (Ace of Base's "Don't Turn Around"). Those with a penchant for shower-singing love her—as do the Grammys, Oscars, and Golden Globes. She's been nominated for at least 20 major awards in her career and has had over 100 songs on the Billboard Hot 100 (more than 50 of them were Top 10 hits).

You might assume that the writer of lyrics like "for every kiss, I'll kiss you back a hundred times" would be a sentimental fool. You'd be wrong. Warren owns a parrot named Buttwhings, wears a necklace that says "Fuck You" in tiny letters, croaks out snarky one-liners,



A STAR IS BORN: Warren at the unveiling of her Hollywood Walk of Fame star, January 2001.

and decorates her couch with a pillow that says, "Your Worst Nightmare: White Trash With Money."

"All the things in here that say something tacky come from Diane," says Julie Horton, executive vice president

of Warren's publishing company, Realsongs, which commands \$20 million annually in royalties. "She's got this really cute sense of humor. It's warped, but it's cute."

Just then, Warren hops down a hallway lined with framed platinum records, her black pixie haircut bobbing, and ushers me into a room where a kid in a "Homies: I'm Down With Them" T-shirt sits at a piano. "Check this shit out," Warren instructs. The kid launches into a soulful R&B-influenced song. Horton, who has followed us in, whispers in my ear that the kid is not a kid, but 24-year-old Ferras, a newly signed Virgin Records artist.

"I love singers," Warren says. "And, shit, I never hear anyone this good," despite working with people like Whitney Houston, Mary J. Blige, Eric Clapton, and Gloria Estefan. The kid looks thrilled. He mentions a '90s song by Xscape that he'd like to emulate. He hums a bit. "You know it?"

"That's my song!" Warren exclaims.

Later, Warren leads me past a bookcase featuring *All About Me*. and *Angry Little Girls* to a green room filled with plush couches. She's one of those >>

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BE A DIANE WARREN HIT SONG?

Here, the hidden science is revealed
By Kelly Marages

					
	CELINE DION	TONI BRAXTON	LEANN RIMES	MICHAEL BOLTON	MILLI VANILLI
THE CHART-TOPPER	"BECAUSE YOU LOVED ME"	"UN-BREAK MY HEART"	"HOW DO I LIVE"	"WHEN I'M BACK ON MY FEET AGAIN"	"BLAME IT ON THE RAIN"
MOST LIKELY TO BE HEARD...	at weddings	on <i>Delilah</i>	on K-Fed's iPod	while on hold/ in elevators	at James Frey's house
THE UNIVERSALLY RELEVANT CHORUS LINE	"You were my strength when I was weak, you were my voice when I couldn't speak"	"Undo this hurt that you caused when you walked out the door and walked out of my life"	"How do I live without you? I want to know, how do I breathe without you?"	"When I'm back on my feet again, I'll walk proud down that street again"	"Whatever you do, don't put the blame on you"
THE UNIVERSAL EMOTION	LOVE	HEARTACHE	DEVOTION	HEARTACHE	HEARTACHE
SOOTHING NATURE IMAGERY	SKY; STARS, as in "You touched my hand, I could touch the sky ... you said no star was out of reach"	RAIN, as in "Don't leave me out in the rain"	SUN; SKY, as in "Without you, there'd be no sun in my sky"	HEAVEN, as in "Gonna feel the sweet light of heaven shining down its light on me"	RAIN; STARS, as in "Blame it on the rain ... blame it on the stars that shine at night"
THE KEY WORD	LOVE (appears 8 times)	HEART (appears 9 times)	BABY (appears 7 times)	AGAIN (appears 16 times)	BLAME (appears 37 times)
THE SINGER'S HAIR	long and FLOWY	long and WAVY	long and BLONDE	long and BRILLO PAD-Y	long and DREADLOCK-Y

ageless California women, somewhere between 34 and 58 (she's 50), with dewy skin, big eyes, and a youthful figure. She picks at the hand-painted tiger on her shoe and considers the central irony of her career:

"I mean, I've never been in love," Warren says. "I know, it's weird." Especially because, how many of her songs are about love? "Approximately 99.999 percent," she says.

Sure, Warren has had relationships, including a seven-year shack-up with a record-industry guy. "But it wasn't really being in love. It was just, like, comfortable. And on occasion it wasn't even that comfortable," she says. "But I love my friends, I love my animals. I have a good imagination. I've always been like this. I didn't even sleep with a guy until I was 24. To be honest, I've only been with three men. I've been so focused on my music."

Whoa, the woman who wrote "How Do I Live," a song that makes singles feel like lepers, is a workaholic loner?

"Maybe my songs are my partner. How 'bout that? Yeah, the biggest relationship I have is with my songs."

Accordingly, she's in therapy. "My shrink once said to me, 'You're 39 and your best friend's a parrot, and you don't need therapy?' She gets on me about balance."

ON A TYPICAL DAY at the Realsongs offices, A-list producers drop by to shop for songs that flatter vocal range and persona. Here lies Warren's secret: Her hits provide any megavoiced singer with a vulnerable identity. Producer Randy Jackson, of *American Idol* fame, stops in one day and sums her up this way: "This woman is the heart and soul of the industry. Most artists are lost. They have to come to Diane to figure out who they are."

"Then they don't listen," Warren shoots back. "Cher hated 'If I Could Turn Back Time.' I had to beg her; literally, on my knees, just to try it. Happens all the time."

The classic Warren tune is born in a flash of inspiration, often as a title

or chorus hook. The best of these are witty plays on the concept of love, such as "I don't want to fall asleep, because I'd miss you, baby"—an Aerosmith lyric that came to Warren when she heard a James Brolin quote about Barbra Streisand.

As for making millions (her catalog is worth nine figures) evoking experiences she has never had, Warren compares songwriting to acting. Think about it: Julia Roberts didn't work as a hooker to do *Pretty Woman*. "I know what it's like to have a broken heart. I know what it's like to feel pain: When my songs don't become hits, it breaks my heart. There are a million ways to break a heart. I can relate."

Only a handful of her titles recall specific events in her life. She wrote "Numb" (recorded by the Pet Shop Boys) after her mother passed away, and recently penned Jessica Simpson's anthem of female independence, "I Belong to Me." "That's the one I really relate to," she says. "I don't need someone to complete me; I complete myself." Otherwise, she is essentially a fiction writer.

On the second morning of my visit with Warren, country crooner Billy Ray Cyrus slides into her studio to record—what else?—a love song. Cyrus explains his career quandary. "How do you follow up 'I Want My Mullet Back'?" The only thing to do is work with a class act like Diane.

Cyrus is new to the Warren sphere and nervous about meeting her. "Coming here is like going over to Mozart's house and hanging," he says, and laughs. "But her looseness is why she writes such great songs. She captures the realness that people feel."

Warren emerges from "The Cave"—the writing room she hasn't cleaned in two decades that features two keyboards, 1980s posters of Cher and Michael Bolton, and towering piles of cassettes. She greets Cyrus by throwing an arm around his shoulder. Small talk turns to Valentine's Day, which is fast approaching. "I don't do much on Valentine's," she says, with a grin. "Maybe I'll write a fucking love song." **mc**

Arianne Cohen

CONTRIBUTION: Wrote "Selling Love."
WHEN I'M NOT WRITING... I'm researching my '08 book for tall folk, *The Tall Book*, exploring why we're happier, richer, smarter—plus where to buy pants.
ODD FACT: I'm licensed in Thai foot massage.

