



FIERCE HEART

Heart singer Ann Wilson is a tough woman who's survived for more than 50 years in a male-dominated music industry. As she releases her third solo album, 'Fierce Bliss', Dave Everley catches up with Wilson to discuss both success and failure, the future of Heart, and why retirement is completely out of the question...

ANN WILSON WAS ON the set of a video shoot when she finally snapped. She can't remember exactly which set it was, but it was sometime in the midst of Heart's imperial phase, around the time of 1987's blockbusting 'Bad Animals' album.

It wasn't anything that happened to Ann herself that sent her over the edge. Instead, it involved her younger sister, Heart guitarist Nancy Wilson. Whoever had 'conceptualised' the video figured it would be a great idea if Nancy embarked on some aerial acrobatics for the benefit of the cameras and the vast audience of MTV viewers it would reach.

"They'd rigged up this giant cliff thing," says Ann today. "They'd got Nancy in a harness, and she was supposed to jump off this cliff while playing guitar. She was way up there. It was really dangerous."

Despite her elder sister's reservations, Nancy did the jump. The director asked for another take, so she did it again. And again. And again. All the while, Ann Wilson's hackles were rising.

"By the time she'd done it that many times, I was really angry: 'Who the hell jumps off a cliff while playing the guitar?'," says Ann. "It was just so f*cking ridiculous. I pitched a fit that day. I just walked out."

Her anger was more than just sisterly concern. The stellar second act of Heart's career, which had begun with their eighth, eponymous album in 1985 and continued through 'Bad Animals', had restored their stardom after a lean period at the start of the decade. But their success had come at a price. Heart's mega-successful singles, the ones that had turned them into an even bigger deal than they'd been during their first flush of fame a decade earlier, had largely been written by other people. Their powerful image – *Dynasty* via the Palace Of Versailles – felt like it was the work of everyone *other* than the members of Heart.

In the end, Nancy Wilson survived jumping off a cliff multiple times, just as Heart themselves survived Ann

Wilson's video-shoot walk-out. But that flash of anger showed that beneath the gloss, Ann Wilson and Heart were more than MTV puppets. And that streak of 'f*ck you' attitude that had turned them into a success story in the first place also carried them through the tough times, of which there have been more than one.

"It's easy to sell your soul, and we did at certain points," says Ann Wilson. "But we came through it."

IT'S LATE morning when Ann calls *Rock Candy Mag* via Zoom from her house in Florida. "It's sunny, it's spring, things are starting to bloom here," she says breezily.

"The birds are coming back." A shadowy figure lurks in the kitchen over her shoulder, unsuccessfully trying to stay out of eyeshot. At one point, the figure crawls across the floor behind her so as not to disturb our conversation. "Oh, that's just my husband," she says with a laugh.

Wilson's other half, Dean Wetter, is the subject of a song on her new solo album, 'Fierce Bliss'. Titled 'Fighten For Life',

it's a slow-burning love-letter to the man Ann has called "my angel". Like the rest of 'Fierce Bliss', it's powered by Ann's instantly recognisable voice, as ringing and distinctive now as it ever was.

'Fierce Bliss' is her third solo album, following 2007's 'Hope & Glory' and 2018's 'Immortal'. But where those two records consisted solely of covers, 'Fierce Bliss' mixes Wilson's versions of tracks by Robin Trower ('Bridge Of Sighs'), Jeff Buckley ('Forget Her'), Eurythmics (a rocked-up 'Missionary Man'), together with originals such as 'Gladiator' and the soaring, pandemic-inspired 'Black Wing'.

"We live out in the country, on a big river," she says of the latter song. "We spent lockdown here, so for months and months I was just looking at nature and these seabirds and everything. And I started to really envy them, because they were so free to just sail over everything that was happening on the ground, with people dying and stuff. So I wrote that song to those birds."

"THE ONLY DOWNSIDE ABOUT HAVING A SOLO THING IS THAT IT'S A LOT LONELIER. I MISS THE CAMARADERIE OF BEING IN A BAND RIGHT NOW. ALL THE ITERATIONS OF HEART SPECIALISED IN GREAT CAMARADERIE."