

Modest Dickson opens her heart to Brunton audience

This may have been Another Suitcase In Another Hall for Barbara Dickson in her glittering career, but the audience with the Dunfermline-born singer/songwriter was personal for the near 500 fans at The Brunton.

She arrived on stage unannounced dressed in a black blouse and black trousers with shiny shoes and the 72-year-old sparkled for the remainder of the set accompanied by her four-piece, specially-assembled band.

The award-winning, Edinburgh-based artist, who was awarded an OBE in Queen's New Year Honours for her services to music and drama, naturally played some of her hits including January February (1982).

Modestly, she did not mention her 17 platinum and gold albums, nor the fact that she remains Scotland's biggest-selling female singer of all time.

Instead, Barbara chatted about her nerve-jangling introduction to acting and the self-effacing star also introduced the audience to songs from her forthcoming album.

She did, however, open up about her acting debut. It came courtesy of Willy Russell, who invited the Scot to star in a new musical, Blood Brothers, in the role of the mother, Mrs Johnstone.

She told of being, at first, reluctant to accept, having never acted before. What she typically did not mention was that but

she garnered critical acclaim as well as Actress of the Year in a Musical from the Society of West End Theatres.

Later, Tim Rice approached Dickson to take part in the recording of the concept album for the musical Chess as Svetlana. Dickson's songs on the album included I Know Him So Well, a duet sung with Elaine Paige.

The song was a worldwide hit, and remained at No 1 in the UK Singles Chart for four weeks and is still cited in the Guinness World Records as the best-selling female duet of all-time. Once again, that accolade was not mentioned.

However, Barbara did touch on her roots and some of her inspirations, including Scots-born musician Gerry Rafferty.

Her tribute album to her friend Rafferty, To Each and Everyone, the Songs of Gerry Rafferty, was released in 2013 and The Ark, the 12th track on the album, was warmly received.

Billy Connolly, another friend, says of Barbara: "From the very first time I heard her, her voice just nailed me to the wall. She's just a one-off." She is.

So what happens now, another line from the lyrics of the Another Suitcase song?

Well, Barbara, who arrived at The Brunton from a folk festival in Skegness, says goodbye for a spell to her tight-knit band, life-long keyboard player Nick Holland, superb drummer Russell Field, who, according to Barbara spends part of his year with Midge Ure, multi-instrumentalist Troy Donockley, and French-based Brad Lang on bass.

For the rest of us, the privilege of having been in her presence for over an hour will be a lasting memory.

In particular. many will recall the rousing final number featuring talented Troy Donockley on the Uilleann pipes. It brought the audience to their feet.

“Singing is not,” says Barbara, “about technique, but what is in your heart. That is the secret”. She opened her heart to us.

One can't close without mentioning her support, engaging Irish-born singer-songwriter, Edwina Hayes.

The Yorkshire-based, 46-year-old, who has played regularly in London and Nashville, tours extensively and has been supporting Barbara for six years.

American singer, guitarist and songwriter, Nanci Griffith, described her as having “the sweetest voice in England” and her short set, including a humorous twist of a gold-digging woman, provided a glimpse of her talent.