

On Life and Meaning

MARK PERES

Episode 34 – Candice Langston – Electric Barbarella

The Reflex

And now a personal word,

When I think of Candice Langston, I think of British new-wave music, heavy eyeliner, padded shoulders, synthesizer pop, and androgyny. She is a time traveler from the '80s music-club scene, a muse in spirit to Nick Rhodes and John Taylor, a connoisseur of all the sounds and lyrics of Duran Duran. Her glam eyes are VH1 and MTV.

But Candice Langston is so much more. She is a business owner, a wife, and a mother. Above all, she is a citizen. She cares about what we say, how we say it, and to whom we say it. She cares about the fabric of neighborhoods and the community and nation our children will inherit. She embraces citizenship with passion, wanting to make a difference, leading causes, addressing legislators, her heart on her sleeve. She is also shy and funny, quiet in person, hilarious on Facebook: she posts the fashion of swinging London, the best-looking slice of lime since the lime shortage of 2014, and pictures of Japanese flying squirrels.

Every time I see Candice, I'm reminded of a close friend I had in the mid-1980s named Anya. Anya was a German-American only child who grew up in the US Virgin Islands. She was loyal and kind and very happy being alone and different. She wore her blond hair short and cut on an angle. She had dozens of black rubber bangles on her wrist, and a British new-wave soundtrack followed her wherever she went: Depeche Mode, the Pet Shop Boys, Simple Minds, Tears for Fears, the Human League. There is one song that always brings me back to moments with her: *Don't Dream It's Over* by Crowded House.

I never quite took to new wave. I was much more conventional in my dress and musical tastes, preferring jeans and Polo shirts and classic rock and rhythm and blues. But I loved that Anya had her edge, that she was sensitive and introspective, that she shaved the sides of her hair, colored it red, and wore black catsuits. That made her fun and daring and real.

We are thirty years on from the mid-1980s. All of us who were young then are middle-aged now. We earn paychecks and pay taxes and provide for our families. Students who are the age now that we were then have iPhones and earbuds and download songs from the cloud and swipe and post and tweet. None of that would have made any sense back in our day.

What does remain the same is our human condition: our sadness and joy, our yearning to connect, our desire for love and something more. We want the energy of the dancefloor, the music of the band to move through us. We want what we want to last as every day it slips away.

That's the thing about soundtracks. They lift our moods and break our hearts. The notes come back from the past only to fade away.

Candice may be a time traveler, but she fully embraces the present and future. She is optimistic and hopeful. She engages with compassion and humor. Her message is clear and consistent: be the solution. Be the world you want to see.

Mark Peres © 2018