



Too Much To Dream: Songwriter Annette Tucker interviewed by Al Hazan

It was in the summer of 1961 when I accidentally met a beautiful brunette by knocking on the wrong door of an apartment building in West Hollywood, California. Little did I know this meeting would begin a lifelong friendship that lives on to this day. The woman I met that morning was Annette Tucker and she would eventually become a successful 1960s songwriter. Today I'm sitting across from Annette in her comfortable Beverly Hills condominium and she's still as lovely as ever, wearing her favorite red dress, complementing her dark hair and almond shaped eyes. We began our conversation by reminiscing about that fateful morning when we met.

Al: Annette, just how long have we known each other?

Annette: It must be over forty years, but who's counting? I think you were looking for a singer who lived in the same building the morning we met.

Al: Right. I remember feeling a little embarrassed about that awkward meeting.

Annette: Yes, it was pretty strange. But after you apologized for the intrusion,



Annette Tucker and Al Hazan, 1961

were a singer in the 1960s as well and actually recorded one of our songs called "Stick Around" on Piper Records.

Annette: Yes, that was fun, but I never really pursued a singing career. As I said, my dream was always to become a hit songwriter.

Al: Well, you've certainly come a long way with that dream of yours. I know you've had quite a few records performed by some of the biggest stars of the 1960s. Would you name a few?

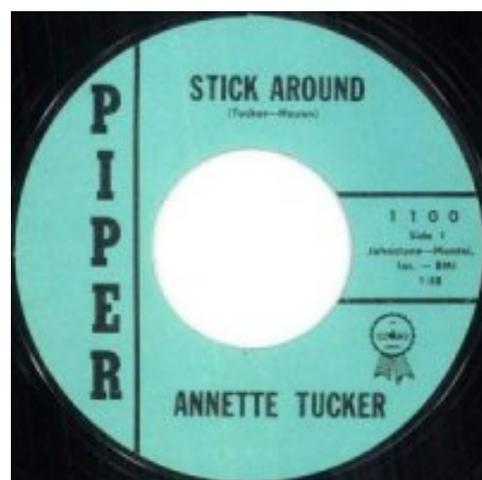
Annette: I've had songs recorded by Sonny and Cher, Frank and Nancy Sinatra, Tom Jones, Rick Nelson, Freddy Cannon, the Knickerbockers, the American Breed, the Ventures, Maureen McGovern, Vicki Lawrence, Trini Lopez, Don Ho, the Brady Bunch, Keely Smith, the Jackson Five, the Electric Prunes and many others.

Al: That's quite a list of famous artists. Which ones went gold? Which ones made the charts?

Annette: Well, the Tom Jones album "Help Yourself" on Parrot Records went gold, as did the Sonny and Cher album "All I Ever

you explained that you were a songwriter and were there to hear your new record. I was impressed that you wrote songs and I quickly admitted that I dreamed of being a songwriter as well. Although I was married at the time, I wanted to have a career of my own aside from being a housewife. As I recall, you and I ended up writing five songs together and they all got recorded. You actually taught me how to write songs and that's how my career got started.

Al: Most people probably don't know you





Need Is You" on Kapp Records. In addition, however, I also had a number one hit in Italy that I wrote with Nancie Mantz entitled "I Ain't No Miracle Worker" and a Country hit in Europe called "She Took The Best Years Of My Wife". "I Had Too Much To Dream Last Night" and "Get Me To The World On Time" by the Electric Prunes were big hits and the album also made the charts. "Green Light" by the American Breed was a chart record as well as the Ventures version of the same song. There was also a chart record by the Knickerbockers and many easy listening chart hits by Frank Sinatra, Patty Page, Maureen McGovern and the Johnny Mann Singers.

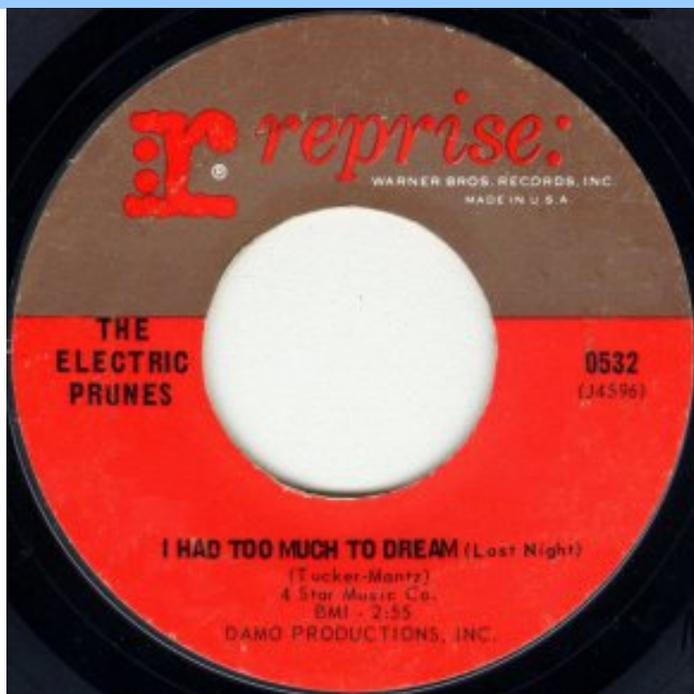
Al: How did you happen to get together with Nancie Mantz who you ended up co-writing many of your songs with? How did you meet and what was it about her that you liked?

Annette: It all began in 1963 when I walked into the office of the Four Star Music Publishing Company on Sunset Boulevard. I was young and eager and I asked if I could demonstrate some of the songs I had written. After I played a few of my songs for them they seemed to be impressed and asked me to come back another day and meet some of their other songwriters. Nancie Mantz was under contract to them at the time and she was the first writer they introduced me to. From the first moment we met we had an immediate connection creatively. Her words sang to me and my music spoke to her. The first song we ever wrote together was called "She's Something Else" and was recorded by Freddy Cannon on Warner Brothers Records. Nancie was good. She was a talented lyric writer with great ideas and a way with words. We got lots of records together and I loved writing with her. She was a pro.

Al: One of your most famous songs is "I Had Too Much To Dream" by the Electric Prunes. How did you two come up with the idea for that song?

Annette: I came up with the title one day and called Nancie. She loved it and we wrote it the next day in one half hour.

Al: Is that how you two worked together?



Annette: I can't tell you how because, as you know, that is the mystery of songwriting. You never know where the words or the melody come from, they just come. The words were there and my melody came easily. I was influenced by the Rolling Stones at the time and that is how I heard that song being recorded.

Al: It's been said that the Prunes' first heard "I Had Too Much To Dream" on a demonstration record by Jerry Vale. Is there any truth to that?

Annette: That's a story that has been circulating but is not true. The demo was recorded by Jerry Fuller at Four Star Music. Dave Hassinger, the producer of "Too Much To Dream", heard it played in person by me. Then, the Prunes heard it played, also in person by me, which is how I always presented my songs to them. After they decided to cut the song I believe they asked for the demo. But that demo was not recorded the way Nancie and I wrote it. As a writer, you know that happens many times to our songs when the publisher hears it another way. Nancie and I envisioned this as a rock song. We loved the things that the Rolling Stones were doing and, as I said, they were a big influence on us when we wrote that song.

Al: In any event, that record turned out to be a monster hit for the Electric Prunes. A classic. You and Nancie must have been on cloud nine at the time. Were you nervous about trying to write a follow-up song?

Annette: "Too Much to Dream" was my first big hit with Nancie and, of course, we were excited to say the least. Then came the pressure of writing a follow up hit. I had another writing partner at the time whose name was Jill Jones. So I was writing with both Nancie and Jill trying to come up with another hit song. Dave Hassinger, the Prunes' producer, ended up choosing "Get Me To The World On Time" as their follow up record. I wrote that song with Jill Jones.

Al: Weren't the Electric Prunes just an unknown group before your songs catapulted them to stardom? I would think they would have been so grateful to you and Nancy. Was that how it was?

Annette: Good Question. The Prunes were an unknown group who I hired to play at a surprise party I gave for my husband. I thought they were a very creative and talented group. A cousin of my husband's brought them to Dave Hassinger, and he came to me asking for material. I played him "Too Much To Dream" and he loved it and had all sorts of great ideas for it. When that became a hit he only wanted to use the songs that I had a part of. The Prunes wanted to do more of

their own thing and little by little the original writers got aced out. After that it was downhill for them and they never had another hit.

Al: There's an old saying, "if it ain't broke, don't fix it". It sounds like they had a good thing going and blew it for some reason. How did that make you feel?

Annette: Actually Al, Nancie Mantz and I had their third single called "Dr. Do Good". It was a wonderful song and it really suited them, but the lead singer's vocal was buried so low that you could not understand anything he was saying. This was a lyric song, and it was important that the listener be able to hear the brilliant lyrics Nancie wrote. So that record died, and so did the group after that. They totally left us out of their third album. I guess I'd have to say I was hurt, angry, and felt they were not very loyal. But life goes on and so Nancie, Jill and I went forward and had other chart records and get signed to some heavyweight companies and publishers. Nancie and I left Four Star Music and got put under contract to Shapiro-Bernstein. After about a year with them, Nancy retired from the music business and I connected with a new songwriter named Kathy Wakefield. She and I were put under contract to Jobete Music at Motown and then Tamerlane at Warner Brothers and the late Don Costa.

Al: There's been a lot of press recently stating that you were writing for the Electric Prunes again and then I heard through the grapevine that you wrote some songs they recorded but, for some reason, they are not going to be in their new album. Is there any truth to those rumors?

Annette: Funny you should ask. There was a wonderful article about them in the Calendar section of the L.A. Times about six months ago. I was so impressed with it, and having not talked to them in 38 years, I got on my computer and found their website. I emailed them and wished them the best. I also told them if they ever played in L.A. to call me and I would make it a point to come and hear them. I received an immediate reply from both Mark and James, the lead singer. They wanted to get together, relive the past, and see if I wanted to write some songs for them again. Our goal was to try and achieve the same success we had together 38 years ago. I tracked down Nancie Mantz but she didn't want to get back into the music business. However, Jill Jones was game and so was Kathy Wakefield. I got together with the Prunes and gave them the songs we had written. Everything seemed fine, however, when I heard those songs I was shocked to discover they had changed the words and the music. It was a total rewrite by them without consulting any of the writers. I believe that there were two potential hits in those songs.



Sometimes a writer just knows. Now all songwriters out there must know that is very upsetting especially when you have written hits before and you really believe you have come up with one. So unless something changes, and there is always hope that it will, I am not writing any more songs for the Prunes.

Al: It sounds like you're feeling betrayed, disappointed and maybe a little angry. Would that be fair to say?

Annette: Yes, the whole episode was very upsetting for me. Lots of time, energy, love and creativity went into the songs that were written. I guess it was the lack of respect that got to me the most.

Al: In conclusion, Annette, what would you say you learned through this whole experience with the Electric Prunes?

Annette: I learned that nothing changes. The Prunes always wanted to do their own thing come hell or high water, right or wrong and I will quote Ritchie Unterberger who wrote about them and said that after their two big hits they became quite erratic. I sadly think that this is still true.

Al: Any suggestions or advice for young budding songwriters?

Annette: My advice to budding songwriters is to be true to yourself, but always listen to suggestions and changes that people in the business make. Maybe you will agree and maybe you won't but at least listen. In the end always trust your own judgment and believe in yourself. If you are showing songs to a producer remember they are looking for songs that will get played on the air and, of course, become a hit. Try to write songs that the average listener can relate to, and remember that the "hook" in the song is always important. Listen to the top songs and know what is happening.

Al: And what are you doing these days to keep yourself busy?

Annette: I have been arranging and producing demos for new songwriters. I also still review lyrics for people who mail them to me or come to my home to have me go over their songs and make suggestions. I love helping writers be the best they can be. At this time in my life I am enjoying my two grandsons and hoping that one of them will be involved in songwriting in some way. It is a wonderful and rewarding profession and I have loved every minute of it. I have a few songs that I wrote the lyrics for with Aaron Kaplan, a wonderful background composer. They will be in some movies that he has done. We also won first place in the American Jewish Song Festival with a song we wrote called "We're Coming Home". People from all over the world submitted songs for that contest. I was proud of that and life is still good.

After writing songs for the Electric Prunes and many other well-known artists, Annette went on to teach songwriting for the ASCAP workshops in the early-1970s and taught a class at UCLA around '76. The



interesting part about her songwriting class is she was primarily a music composer who learned to write lyrics and then taught what she learned to others. Her workshop turned out some important songwriters such as Jason Blume and Art Masters. Blume has a successful book out about songwriting in which he gives Annette credit for starting him on his career when he didn't have a dime and was practically starving.

And now, here we are, Annette and I, over forty years later and we are still close friends who stay constantly in touch. She continues to write songs and, who knows, maybe one of these days she'll surprise us with another hit or two.



Illustrations supplied by Annette Tucker, Al Hazan, David A. Young, Mike Edwards, Bill George and A. D. Baylis.

**Annette Tucker, Nancie Mantz and Jill Jones on the Electric Prunes
: <http://www.electricprunes.com/>**

To hear Annette singing her 1961 recording of "Stick Around" visit the discography link at <http://www.alhazan.com>

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