



> BY EILEEN SHAPIRO  
CELEBRITY CORRESPONDENT

# Debbie Gibson

“ELECTRIC YOUTH” 35TH ANNIVERSARY @ TOWN HALL NYC

The fiery icon, singer/songwriter, producer, actress and advocate Debbie Gibson will be rocking Town Hall in New York City on July 26, with special guests John Lloyd Young and Orfeh. Debbie will be celebrating the 35th anniversary of her Number 1 album “Electric Youth.” A shining star never gets lost in the darkness, and like the luminous power and light of a supernova, Debbie produces as much energy in an instant as our sun will produce in 10 billion years.

Still holding the world record for being the youngest female to ever write, produce and perform a #1 hit song, “Foolish Beat” (According to Guinness World Records), Debbie is a trail-blazing pop star anomaly.

With hits like “Only in My Dreams”, “Shake Your Love”, “Lost in Your Eyes” and a marathon of others, Debbie is a symbol of the heartbeat of the world and proof that she thinks beyond the obvious.



DEBBIE GIBSON - PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Her fans take refuge in the echoes of the familiar and in the eloquence of her enthusiasm.

In an in-depth conversation, Debbie spoke about her upcoming New York appearance, the highlights and enchanting moments of her career, and the stuff that dreams are made of...

## INTERVIEW >>>

**HELLO, DEBBIE. HOW DOES IT FEEL TO HAVE THE ENTIRE MEET AND GREET FOR THE NY CONCERT SELL OUT IN LIKE THREE MINUTES?**

The meet and greet is sold out, but there are still tickets left....It's getting there, but it's always great to have a wonderful New York reception. The meet and greet sold out immediately, and obviously doing my hometown show is always a thrill.

**WHAT ARE YOU MOST EXCITED ABOUT IN DOING THIS TOUR?**

I've been doing these Electric Youth shows all year. I did some of them on the 80's cruise, I did one in Hawaii, some in Asia, and now I'm doing the East Coast run, and it's so much fun to kind of marry the then and now because I do the original set list. A lot of the original costumes, a lot of the original singers, dancers, band members on stage.... so, to kind of relive those moments in a way, but also to be who we are now in our modern lives in a modern world.... To kind of connect all those dots, it's amazing. Obviously, seeing the fans is always the best. Then again, I can feel the energy of a lot of people remembering being at one of the original Electric Youth shows. So, it's a really special time. In the particular show in New York Orfeh [a Broadway performer] and John Lloyd Young [Tony winner] are going to join me. I had an amazing phone call with John Lloyd Young yesterday. He's in Europe performing and we had a little brainstorming session and I was at my piano. We were coming up with a really cool arrangement for a surprise that we are going to do together that we've never done together. So that kind of thing is always amazing, especially since my roots are in Broadway. So two of my friends who are Broadway stars and close friends joining me is something for this one-off event. This is only for the New York show. So that's super, super exciting.

**HOW COOL IS IT TO BE HONORED FOR YOUR ACTIVISM AND SUPPORT OF THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY? WHAT ORIGINALLY DREW YOU IN TOWARDS THE GAY COMMUNITY, WHERE YOU VERY QUICKLY BECAME A GAY ICON?**

That's so sweet. It's interesting because I'm working on writing my book now, so ultimately, I'm exploring a lot of themes in my life because I've asked myself that question all the time. I kind of know internally why, but it's hard to articulate sometimes. In writing one of my early childhood chapters, I was talking about doing *The Sound of Music*. I wore my "Lonely Goatherd" costume to school one day. I looked like the Swiss Miss girl. I just felt like, well, why shouldn't I be able to be my authentic, unique self? So if I see now that a boy wants to wear a dress to school, I think how fantastic is that? Somebody knows who they are and we should all celebrate everybody's uniqueness in general. Coming from the theater world and then starting to do teen clubs, straight clubs, and gay clubs to launch "Only in My Dreams" starting in 1986, I really got to know the gay community through those shows. I always would say to my mom that I can't wait to get to the gay club, which by the way, that show was always at like anywhere between two and five in the morning. I always felt like these are my people. There is always a joy. It always felt like the gay audience threw their arms around me, and there was also like a discernment. It was like the audience said, "We love you and we're rooting for you, but we also have high standards". I always loved that. I always felt like I wanted to be at my best. But I think it's about an openness, and I think in a way coming from me being a young girl, and I was the only female I knew producing records, I wasn't in everybody's box. It was kind of like this is a freaky, techie little girl, who has a studio in her house. I always felt a little different and I think I had to forge my own path. I think I grew up with an openness and my mom always instilled in me ...

*I always hated the word accepting..... accepting makes it sound like we're like accepting something bad... so no, we are celebrating...I am always celebrating who people are. I have people even in my own family who were raised by nuns. There is a lifelong belief imprinted in them that they are never going to break out of, 'cause they're 90. I still like to have those conversations, even with those people. Everybody can always understand everybody's unique experience. But I always say that I think it's up to us as human beings to refer to the person whose experience it is and say, "Well, you know best about you. You know what you want in your life", so I always support everything anyone wants in their life. It's kind of weird to get a pat on the back for being an ally because I have this crazy idea that everyone should have the same rights. We all should function that way in the world. I am thrilled to be an ally and the loyalty that comes from the LGBTQ community, it's lifelong. There are no fair weather friends. Any chance I get to stand up and raise my voice, I do...I got to create the movie "Notes of Autumn" for Hallmark last year. It was one of the first big LGBTQ themed movies. I was so proud. I remember the moment when they had done the ad, and it was two brides and there was a big uproar. Hallmark was known as more leaning towards the Christian side. I remember Jack Wagner spoke up, I spoke up, and a few other people spoke up. So to go from that moment to actually being able to create a movie with the storyline, which was a heterosexual storyline, and a homosexual storyline, that kind of paralleled each other. My favorite moment was at the end of the movie, when there was a split screen and the boys are kissing and the boy and the girl were kissing, it was the left side of the screen and the right side of the screen, and it was very Gone With the Wind, and it was very symbolic of some representation from Hallmark. And it was really thrilling to get that to the screen.*



## **DO YOU RECALL A MOMENT THAT CHANGED THE WHOLE TRAJECTORY OF YOUR LIFE?**

*Oh, wow, that's a great question. There is one I'm thinking of. When I was 11, I auditioned for Annie. They were dividing kids into groups. For example, we are keeping these hundred kids and we're sending these thousand kids home. They were creating the groups for who they were keeping and who they were doing a callback with. They sent me packing. My mom said to me, "No, honey, they put you in the wrong group." She told me I belong in that group over there and she pointed to the group of a couple of 100 kids that were staying. She said I belonged over there. And so, I decided to sneak into that group and see what happens. Now, out of that couple of hundred kids, I made it down to the last 10. So I did indeed belong in that group. That was the biggest message, that it's up to you to know your own worth. It's up to you to know where you stand in the world. It's up to you to know what your skills are and also having the cojones to sneak into that group because the world is not going to take as good care of you as you will take of yourself. That was a really life altering moment for me. I learned a lot of lessons in that one. But then, I was too tall and I didn't get the role—that was another story. I remember it vividly too. When we were getting my records out, my late mom and I always felt that if we could get people to hear the music, the audience is going to take it and embrace it. But it's getting over those hurdles and getting past the gatekeepers, so that was a big lesson back then. Thirty seven years into a career, we get a lot of yeses, but we also get a lot of nos.*

## **HAVE YOU HAD YOUR ULTIMATE STAGE FANTASY?**

*One of them was so early on, when I got to play and sing with Billy Joel at the Garden. That's a good one and that one's really hard to beat. I look at the women like Shania Twain. She's headlining arenas and stadiums. A lot of women are having a second act in their late 50s, early 60s, and that's really my goal in this chapter that I'm in. I want to bring the music to as many people as I can at the highest level I can, and that's my stage fantasy beyond anything. "Electric Youth", even though it was a song that at the time was empowering young people, really it's an anti-ageism song. It's so much fun to do it now because really, it's saying you're always useful, you're always vital, you're always relevant and you're always empowered at any age. And that's how the message has gone now, which is so much fun because again, there are people who are embarking on a second act. Where the people are still married for the first time in their 50s or divorced and they're starting a new act in their life, they're solo and they're on their adventure... a lot of people, I think, in my generation are experiencing kind of a rebirth. It's a great time for that. So the ageism thing was kind of a thing, especially for women in pop music not too long ago, but it's really changed.*

## **HEY LOOK AT DOLLY, LOOK AT CHER.**

*Look at Dolly, look at Cher... I saw Cher recently at Clive Davis's party. She was so lovely. She did that little like surprise drop-in at the Abbey in West Hollywood. She stays connected and relevant and rooted in her LGBTQ audience. It's all inspirational. I look at these women like Mariah Carey and Belinda, and they look and sound better than ever.*

## **I WAS JUST AT A CLIVE DAVIS EVENT RECENTLY TOO.**

*Well, he's a real music guy. It's funny that you asked about stage fantasies. I sat with Clive to honor my friend Richard Weitz. We were at the Tennis Hall of Fame dinner at Cipriani's and I performed and Clive was right there.*

It was the first time in 35 years that I've ever performed for Clive. To see him at the table kind of bopping his head along. He's always rooting for everybody.... And I thought, "That's one I can check off the list". That was really cool. I don't know how many people in the younger generation would appreciate that, but he's one of the original music men. I have such a respect for him and for that whole time.

**WELL, EVERYONE THAT KNOWS YOU SAYS THAT YOU'RE ONE OF THE COOLEST PEOPLE IN THE ENTERTAINMENT BUSINESS... YOU AND TONY ORLANDO.**

Awwwwww.....that is so nice. I can say that I always have a young and hungry mentality. Nothing's ever wasted on me, I'm always grateful. Tony Orlando is one of my dear friends. He's awesome.

**WHAT WAS IT LIKE FIRST HEARING YOUR SONG PLAYED ON THE RADIO?**

I was young, but what was so cool for me is that I was still in that fan of pop music phase. I was a teenage girl winning radio contests. I was winning tickets and albums by calling in to WPLJ and being the ninth caller. So, to segue from that to having that lifelong dream of hearing myself on the radio realized was incredible. I was driving with my dad in the car. We were heading back from the city to Long Island. I was coming from a voice lesson, and I could hear the opening beats. We knew it was going to be played at some point, but we didn't know when. It was like, "Oh,

my God", it was pretty awesome.

**ANY NEW MUSIC COMING OUR WAY?**

Yeah.... I'm still kind of in the era of the two albums that I did, but yes, I'm writing new stuff. I released "The Body Remembers" and that was three years ago... and that was a double album. Then I released "Winterlicious" right away a year later, and that was a pretty aggressive time for me for releasing music. Which I love because I'm still kind of promoting those two records. But I'm constantly writing, constantly, constantly, so I can hardly keep up with my own thoughts, which is a happy problem. There are some new songs that I'm very, very excited about that are a little more in the singer/songwriter piano kind or realm. "The Body Remembers" was a little bit more of an aggressive pop-rock, dance vibe... and that's really because it was born in the pandemic. The pandemic saw a lot of people trying to figure out how to get out of the angsty state they were in. Music for me. It was that music. But now, I've been spending a lot of time in Malibu at the beach, so music is a little more reflective, so I'm very excited about it. There are a lot of announcements coming up for the year about more live shows I'll be doing and then next, you'll probably see me recording.



PHOTO CREDIT: PATRICK LASANAS