



Pop Innovator,
1986

Lauper says she
“wasn’t going to
budge” about the
type of music she
wanted to do.

[Cyndi
Lauper]

My Life *in* Pictures

A REBEL SPIRIT WITH A BIG HEART AND A FLAIR FOR
THE FLAMBOYANT, THE SINGER AND SONGWRITER LOOKS
BACK ON HER COLORFUL JOURNEY By **GILLIAN TELLING**

When record execs first heard Cyndi Lauper’s unusual four-octave singing range in the early ’80s, they thought they’d found the next Barbra Streisand. “I love Barbra Streisand, don’t get me wrong,” says Lauper, 66, who, like Streisand, was born in Brooklyn. “I could imitate her by the time I was 9. But after a cousin gave me records of the Supremes and the Beatles, that was it. I just loved rock and roll.”

And rock and roll helped save her. After her mom, a waitress, and dad divorced when she was 5, her mom remarried. Lauper, who became serious about singing and playing the guitar when she was 12, soon found her rebellious side, dyeing her hair wild colors and wearing thrift-store clothes, which led to bullying at school and her eventual expulsion. She fled



Game Changer
“I didn’t want a Svengali. I wanted to make it the way men made their music careers—with their mind,” says Lauper (in N.Y.C. in 2016).



Musical Beginnings, 1956

A young Cyndi (far right) with dad Fred, mom Catrine and siblings Elen and Fred. “I learned to sing listening to my mother’s Broadway records and would imitate everyone, even the men. My mother said I was a very odd kid. What can I tell you?”

‘I like colors in my hair....
I love dressing up. I’m more
comfortable like that’



Grammy Newcomer, 1984

“The label said, ‘Get on a plane. You’re going to the Grammys!’ It was very exciting,” says Lauper, who presented with Rodney Dangerfield and won for Best New Artist.



‘We Are the World,’ 1985

“It was pretty miraculous to see all those artists,” says Lauper of the charity hit. “I was wearing all these beads because I didn’t want to be a plain Jane. After a while Quincy Jones goes, ‘What is all that jangling? Take them off!’”



Rock for a Cause, 1985

“This was the first AIDS benefit that Elizabeth Taylor ever put together,” says Lauper (performing with Rod Stewart at the Commitment to Life dinner in Los Angeles). She and Stewart have gone on tour together in recent years.



home at 17 (she later alleged abuse by her stepfather) and found refuge in the downtown New York art and rock scenes, where she fronted the rockabilly band Blue Angel. When she was approached with solo offers, she says, she had no desire to conform: “I didn’t want to be made over, and I didn’t want to be a balladeer. I wanted to rock out!”

That she did. Her 1983 breakout album, *She’s So Unusual*, with hits “Girls Just Want to Have Fun” and “Time After Time,” made her an instant star and an alternative style icon. “I did things differently,” she says with a laugh. In 1991 she wed actor David Thornton, now 66, and they had a son, Declyn, 22, in 1997. When Declyn was younger, Lauper tried to fit in with other New York school moms. “I tried wearing jeans and T-shirts, but I wasn’t really comfortable in my skin,” she says. “Then Lady Gaga came out, and it woke me up again. I realized I didn’t have to worry about looking like a freak.” With more than 50 million records sold, Lauper has won two Grammys, an Emmy and a Tony. She’s a passionate activist for the LGBTQ community—and supports people coping with the autoimmune skin disease psoriasis, which she has had for much of her life. She still writes and performs in her signature over-the-top costumes. “That’s the story of my life,” she says. “I just want to combine art and music. It’s who I am.” ●



Style Icon, 1983

"I wanted wild makeup for my first promo picture," she says. "I got a guy who could draw anything—one time he did a check pattern on my eyelids. Some people thought I messed up fashion, but you've got to mix it up. You can't always be conservative!"



Lasting Love, 1991

Lauper met actor David Thornton on the 1990 set of their film *Off and Running*, and they married the next year. "We're spending a lot of time in a small space together now, but it's all right," she says of currently isolating at home in Manhattan.

Proud Ally, 2012

The longtime LGBTQ-rights advocate was grand marshal at New York City's 2012 Gay Pride Parade. "When you see your friends and family get their civil rights stripped away, you have to do something," says Lauper, who co-founded True Colors United in 2008 to support homeless LGBTQ youth.



Broadway Breakouts, 2013

Lauper and Billy Porter both won Tonys for the hit musical *Kinky Boots*, for which she wrote the music. Now "it's so great to see how happy he is, how free, how excitingly creative—and to see him finally be recognized and applauded."



Music as Art, 2019

Lauper opened the WorldPride festival in Brooklyn. "It was the pinnacle of doing a performance-art piece," she says. "We had drag queens and transgender people of all shapes and sizes, young and old, and we just danced."