

Annie Lennox Gets Vocal

Why the singer-songwriter is lending her voice to women who have none

WORDS BY FRANKIE MATHIESON

ILLUSTRATION BY ESRA RØISE

Annie Lennox is reflecting on the number of times she's visited Africa as an HIV/Aids activist and advocate. 'It became painfully obvious during these trips that millions of women and girls continue to live in the Dark Ages with regards to a lack of rights and opportunities,' she says. Born in Scotland, Lennox is aware of the privileges Western women have inherited from the effort and sacrifice of the Suffragette movement. 'We can be complacent about these rights and take them for granted because we've never known it any other way.'

Outspoken, determined and inspiring, Lennox is anything but complacent, despite an impressive list of achievements. With eight BRIT Awards on her mantle, the singer-songwriter has won Best British Female Artist more than any other musician. She also holds four Grammys, a Golden Globe, an Academy Award and was the first woman to receive

the prestigious Ivor Novello BASCA Fellowship – the highest honour the British Academy of Songwriters, Composers and Authors can bestow. Considered one of the most successful female British artists of all time, Lennox has sold more than 80 million records worldwide since *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)* climbed the charts in 1983 and gave her and Dave Stewart their first number one hit as the Eurythmics.

There is, of course, more to Lennox than her music. Lending her powerful voice to those who don't have one, her tireless campaigning has been recognised with many honours, including a Red Cross Humanitarian Award, Woman of Peace Award, the Livingstone Medal and an OBE in 2011. 'Over a decade ago, I became passionately engaged with how HIV and Aids were affecting women and children,' says Lennox. She was moved to 'try to do something' after working with Nelson Mandela's 46664 Foundation. 'Too many

lives – in particular, adolescent girls – continue to be ravaged by Aids to this day,' she says. She went on to found the SING campaign in 2007 to help prevent the spread of HIV in South Africa and a year later founded The Circle. 'I started to think of ways to connect with other women who might want to become more aware and get involved,' she explains. 'That's how the genesis of The Circle began.'

Uniting women from different backgrounds, The Circle connects its members with women and girls in developing countries who are in need of support. They work together to promote and protect female rights, and in less than a decade have raised more than £1.8m to help more than 120,000 women and girls around the world. This month, members of The Circle will be attending International Women's Day to 'meet other women, make new connections, talk about our work and be inspired', Lennox tells us. This will be the third year The

Circle has been involved with International Women's Day and is a chance to 'reflect on the progress made and call for change'.

'You can show up at marches, beat the proverbial drum, and give talks and interviews for years, but change can often seem very far from even being a possibility,' says Lennox, who describes the pace of developments for gender parity as 'glacially slow'. She believes that in order to fully bring about societal transformation, the feminist movement needs to be 'holistic, welcoming and inclusive of men and boys'. Lennox's voice is strong but she needs other people to engage and help spread the word. Despite the fact that the term feminist has 'more often than not been a cause for confusion, division and provocation', Lennox is hopeful the 'zeitgeist is moving towards an eventual tipping point'. ■

The Circle: In Conversation with Annie Lennox is at Little House, March 12.



LENNOX'S LIST OF WOMEN MAKING AN IMPACT

Eve Ensler

'A playwright, performer, feminist and activist best known for her impactful play, *The Vagina Monologues*.'

Jude Kelly

'Women of the World Festival founder and artistic director of the Southbank Centre – Jude is quite simply a force of nature.'

Molly Melching

'Founder of the NGO Tostan – a true champion whose mission is to bring about sustainable development and positive social transformation.'

Dame Anita Roddick

'Although Anita died in 2007, her influence as an activist and environmental campaigner still affects me to this day.'

Zainab Salbi

'Author, women's rights activist, and founder of Women for Women International – a fearlessly dedicated feminist.'

Malala Yousafzai

'I don't think I need to describe why I have such admiration for this exceptional young woman.'