

MADONNA

AT

She's fearless, focused and ferocious – on the eve of Madonna's birthday, her close friends and confidants share their revealing memories of the Queen of Pop exclusively with Style

Words **Scarlett Russell**

ADDITIONAL REPORTING: CLARA STRUNCK. PHOTOGRAPHS: GETTY, MICHAEL HIGGINS, HERB RITTS/TRUNK ARCHIVE, PIP SEED



Dressed for her wedding to Sean Penn, 1985



SUSAN SEIDELMAN

*Director of **Desperately Seeking Susan**, 1985*

"Self-confidence. That's what first struck me about Madonna.

She was relatively unknown when we were casting *Desperately Seeking Susan*. She arrived in a taxi at the casting office, but without money to pay for the ride. She hurried into the office and asked a girl at a desk for money to pay the taxi. I remember everyone commenting on what a cheeky thing that was to do. I don't know if she ever paid the girl back, but when I heard the story, it fitted the free-spirited character of Susan perfectly.

We shot the first scene on St Mark's Place, in the East Village — it's the scene where Susan spots a newspaper article about the stolen Egyptian earrings. It was all very low-key: no security guards, no entourage, no spectators. By the time we finished filming the movie only nine weeks later, the *Like a Virgin* album was about to be released and she was on the cover of *Rolling Stone* magazine. We suddenly needed security guards to film on the street as her presence was drawing big crowds of autograph seekers and paparazzi — and the film was now being referred to in the press as 'the Madonna movie'. Crazy."



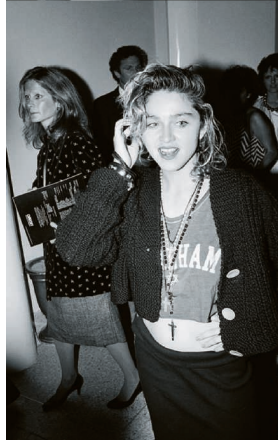
MARLENE STEWART
Costume designer, 1985-1991

"From the moment I met her I could tell she had a razor-sharp focus. She knew what she wanted even if she wasn't sure of all the steps to get there. When we had wardrobe fittings for *Express Yourself*, *Vogue* or photoshoots, I would bring along clothes from my closet as well as vintage rentals, and it would be like girls playing dress-up with black lace and corsets, or a showgirl outfit. She never wanted to buy designer clothes. Dressing up was a way of acting out her dreams and who she wanted to play, whether it was the man in a suit, the seductress, the innocent girl or the vixen. I designed Madonna's wedding dress for her marriage to Sean Penn in 1985 and was bringing it with me to the wedding, when I was stopped by security down the road because I didn't have any ID. It took a while for him to finally verify, through a walkie-talkie, who I was. I made it to the wedding, where Herb Ritts took the photos, including one where I was under the dress making sure her garter stayed up."

With Rosanna Arquette in *Desperately Seeking Susan*, 1985



The Blond Ambition tour, 1990



VINCENT PATERSON
Director of the Blond Ambition tour, 1990

"When I was putting the tour together, I was choreographing Like

a Prayer and I wanted a move where the male dancers would lift her up. She was very pro women's rights and said, 'I don't want to be lifted up like some girl.' I said, 'No, Madonna, you're not going to be lifted up like a girl, you're going to be lifted up like a queen.' She turned around and said, 'Lift me, boys!' I worked with her for eight or nine years in total. I think she liked me because I wasn't afraid of the controversy. When we were choreographing Like a Virgin, I said, 'I want to put you in a bed with two eunuchs standing up next to you.' She came to rehearsals the next day with the Gaultier pointed bras, saying, 'Look what I found!' The craziness just went on from there until we reached having her masturbate on the bed. She was almost arrested in a few cities because of that. It's my proudest moment."



RICHARD E GRANT
Starred in Madonna's directorial debut, Filth and Wisdom, 2008

"I first met Madonna with [comedian and actress] Sandra Bernhard in 1991 when we had Valentine's Day dinner at Sandra's house. I'd describe her as, 'singularly singular'. Her attention is laser-like until she loses interest. But for all her smarts and toughness, for me, she's still that little girl whose mother died when she was five years old. It always struck me that her ferocious need to succeed is motored by that silent plea of, 'Watch me, Mama.'"



MAUREEN ORTH
Journalist

"I'd been a contributor to Vanity Fair for four years when I interviewed Madonna for the 1992 cover story to mark the release of her coffee-table book Sex. For the magazine shoot, she was dressed up like a little girl and posing provocatively — you definitely couldn't get away with it today. Madonna's publicist asked me to do the interview as she thought we'd get on — she described us as 'two smart women'. I went to her apartment in New York. She was very business-like: not unfriendly, but not a warm and fuzzy person either. Taylor Swift once baked cookies for me; you'd never catch Madonna doing that! We were there to discuss the book, but she wouldn't let me turn the pages. She was in control. I asked her whether her ex Warren Beatty had taught her much about building an empire. She responded that she already had an empire and that, if anything, she taught him. 'It's meant to be funny,' she told me of the book, but people didn't see it that way. I never heard if she liked my interview, and that was the last time I met her — though when I started investigating Michael Jackson in 1993, I learnt he kept a white cobra he named Madonna. Clearly, megastars are competitive with one another."

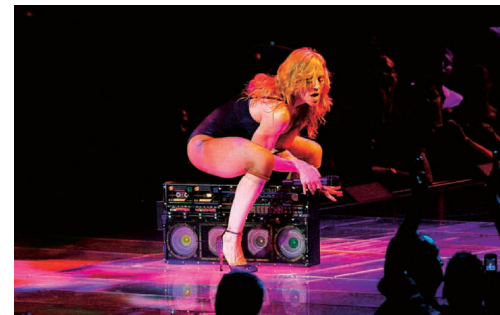
At the Women's March on Washington, 2017



DONNA DE LORY
Backing singer, 1987-2007

"We always sang Holiday before going out on stage before

every performance, that was our ritual, I think because it was so fun and upbeat. What I remember most about Madonna was her stamina — literally, I tried to go running with her once and couldn't keep up. And fearless, fear is not an option for Madonna. We performed at the Staples Center, LA, two or three days after 9/11 in 2001. It was the last venue of the Drowned World tour and everyone told her that she didn't have to go on if it would be too difficult. She was so bound to New York, after all. It would've been easy to cancel, everyone would have understood. She wouldn't hear of it. Performing that night was the most vulnerable I'd ever seen her. It was so soon after the attack, we were all in shock, but she pulled us all together and told us how much she appreciated us. To me, it summed up what she was about, that nothing was going to stand in her way and that nothing would make her fearful."



Aged 21, in New York, 1979



DONNA DE LORY: PHOTOGRAPHS: GETTY, MERT ALAS & MARCUS PIGGOTT, JESSICA CRAIG-MARTIN/TRUNK ARCHIVE, @MADONNA, ALAMY, WATT MIDLIN



With Jean-Michel Basquiat, her then boyfriend, 1982



GINA BROOKE
Make-up artist, 2004-15

"I call her M. I've never called her Madonna. The

Confessions Tour [2006] was all about disco, so I had little fake diamonds glued to fake eyelashes. We had a small area beneath the stage where we would change her wardrobe between songs. It was so quick we would have to choreograph the movements, so when the stylist was pulling off her boot, someone else was taking off the jacket, another person was changing her hair. One day she said to me, 'I want you to do an eyelash change in the middle of my performance.' I mean, literally you have seconds. I can't say to her, 'That's impossible.' If you don't know how to do it, you have to figure it out. I used to have panic attacks before that lash change, because I'd have less than a minute and a half to put them on amid everyone else, and one wrong move and you can glue the eye. I never made a mistake and it was simply out of fear! She always gives 100% so if you don't too, then she has no use for you. The first time we met was my 'audition' in her hotel room. We sat down in her bathroom and when the hairdresser turned on his hair-dryer my beauty light blew. I asked if she minded moving to the window. She told me she did mind. So I had to do half her face with terrible lighting and her asking questions about every single product. When I'd finished one side, I said, 'Do you mind if we move to a window now? Because I really can't see what I'm doing.' She said, 'You've already asked and I said no.' I replied, 'When you see your make-up, don't blame me. I can't do make-up without proper lighting.' She looked at me, gave me a small touch on the arm and said, 'You know what? I like you.' She was testing me. I did her make-up on four tours after that."

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