

HELLO!

C A N A

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PRINCE CHARLES AN EMOTIONAL RETURN TO CANADA WITH HIS 'DARLING WIFE' CAMILLA



EXCLUSIVE AT HOME WITH LIONA BOYD

ON HER LOVE FOR PIERRE TRUDEAU

'Pierre asked me
to live with him and
have a child by him'



ROBERT PATTINSON AND KRISTEN STEWART WE BITE INTO THE RUMOURS OF A REAL-LIFE ROMANCE





THE QUEEN OF CLASSICAL GUITAR
LIONA BOYD
OPENS UP ABOUT PRINCE PHILIP, PIERRE TRUDEAU AND
FACING HER FEAR THAT SHE WOULD NEVER PLAY AGAIN

'Pierre asked me to come and live with him and have a child by him'

Classical guitarist Liona Boyd, 60, has scaled the heights of the music profession and enjoyed a glamorous personal life – including an eight-year romance with Pierre Trudeau when he was prime minister – and a close friendship with Prince Philip. Born in the U.K. and raised in Canada, the five-time Juno winner discovered her passion for the guitar at age 13, and still describes the instrument as “the love of my life.”

But almost a decade ago, the music-filled life she cherished seemed to be at an end when Liona developed task-specific focal dystonia – a syndrome her doctors said was caused by literally “wearing out” the neural receptors that sent messages from her brain to one of her fingers. “The guitar was like an extension of my own body,” she says. “It was very, very devastating to know that one of my fingers wasn’t working.” In the aftermath, her 14-year marriage to real estate developer John B. Simon crumbled and Liona wondered if she’d ever perform again.

Against the odds, this fall the diva has returned stronger than ever, recording two new albums – *Liona Boyd Sings Songs of Love* and *Seven Journeys: Music for the Soul and the Imagination*. And while she may not be able to manage the more unforgiving classical songs, she’s still playing her beloved guitar.

Here, the warm, enthusiastic and adventurous Liona opens her Connecticut home to *Hello! Canada*, talks about the joy that music, love and friendship have brought to her life and explains why making music has remained her destiny. ▶

Beautiful Canadian guitarist Liona Boyd (left, at her Connecticut home) has recorded more than 20 albums and performed before sold-out crowds – and the Queen. The virtuoso had two of her guitar cases turned into a table, which she uses to display her five Juno Awards. ‘Those cases have been around the world with me,’ she says. ‘Every single sticker is an adventure in my life.’



Liona – whose parents were both artists – has filled her house with musical instruments and works of art. Above: Dressed to perform, Liona stands next to a Marc Chagall drawing given to her by her ex-husband. Opposite: The musician's dining room doubles as her art gallery. 'That's where I put the paintings I've done myself,' she says. Her artworks often feature guitars and musical scores.

'Prince Philip is a dear friend. He's still my best pen pal'

Liona, you and Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau will go down as one of Canada's most glamorous couples. How did you meet? We met first in 1975 up at [the Prime Minister's country retreat in Quebec] Harrington Lake. [A friend] took me up to meet Pierre and Margaret. She was just pregnant with Michel at the time and we spent an afternoon swimming in the lake. I serenaded the two [older] boys and I never thought I would see him again. Then a year and half later, I was in Kamloops, B.C., and he was there for a convention. The next thing I knew Pierre had invited me to come after his convention and serenade him again. Then he started inviting me to play for world leaders – and under the pretext of booking me gigs, he got to see me and we had an eight-year romance.

Was this after his marriage to Margaret? Yes, after he had broken up with Margaret. I was single and he was separated.

Why do you think you hit it off? I'm fluent in French and Spanish and that's what Pierre, I think, appreciated about me – that I had lived around the world and had travelled everywhere. We used to compare experiences. It's hard now for me to find someone that's had such a rich experience.

And how did you feel about him? He was a very, very special man. I wish I had been more in love with him, because he did ask me to come and live with him and have a child by him. Maybe it was the age difference – although I ended up marrying an older man. Maybe he conditioned me to look for an older man! [Pierre was 28 years older than Liona; her former husband was 24 years her senior.] He was a dear friend. We used to tell each other we loved each other, but I know I wasn't really truly

'I'll never forget eating cucumber sandwiches and sitting on the Queen's loo in the private jet'

in love. I think the only time I really have been totally in love was when I first met my husband. But Pierre and I had wonderful years together. Pierre was very sensitive to the arts, loved guitar music and certainly helped introduce me to people around the world.

Including the Queen and Prince Philip, right? Yes, Pierre first introduced me, having me play for them in Ottawa.

You became great friends with Prince Philip and he soon enlisted you to start performing for his charities... I've played at many charitable events up in Scotland, mostly the Duke of Edinburgh Awards and the World Wildlife Fund. He's very passionate about that. I thought he was so badly portrayed in that movie *The Queen* because he really did come off as a total bore and he's not – he's very funny. He's a Gemini and he's very amusing.

Did sparks fly between you? It's not a romance. I mean he's never even kissed my hand or anything. He just loves my music.

Tell us about some of the experiences you had with him. He flew me on his plane down to London once from Manchester. I said, "I want to pretend I'm flying the plane." So he let me fly it a little bit – it was a very bumpy flight down to London. I was a bit scared, I really was. Then I sat on the Queen's loo in the private jet – I had to test that out! It was very cushy, by the way – one of those soft, soft ones. And I ate cucumber sandwiches. I couldn't believe it. I said: "This is a moment I'll never forget – eating cucumber sandwiches and sitting on the Queen's loo and being on this bumpy flight with Philip."

You went on to perform at Windsor Castle. Was that unnerving? No, no, because I knew that Prince Philip and the Queen were not like critics and they love music. I wrote a special piece for them called "Serenade for a Summer's Evening," and it was a beautiful summer evening in Windsor [when I performed]. My ex-husband loved it because we got to sleep in the castle and have breakfast the next day with Prince Philip and the Queen. The Queen's mother, who was alive then, chatted to us and a corgi dog almost bit my nose off!

How did that happen? I asked the Queen about a corgi I was petting and she said, "Oh, this one is my mama's dog." I was ▶





When one of her fingers started to fail her, Liona had to stop playing the difficult classical compositions she played in the past. Rather than give up, she started writing songs that she could sing – even though she'd believed since childhood that she couldn't carry a tune. 'I've discovered a great joy in singing' says the spirited beauty. 'It's opened up another chapter in my life.'

'I had to get divorced because my husband wanted me to quit music.'

leaning down and woof! He almost lunched on my nose.

That didn't take you out of the Queen's good graces, did it? No, no – she laughed.

Do you stay in touch? Prince Philip is still my best pen pal. I've just sent him my new album. Hopefully it's playing right now in Buckingham Palace! Before that I sent him "Greensleeves" – I wrote a version on my guitar using King Henry VIII's melody. I just sent the lyrics and he said: "They're brilliant, beautiful, come and play." So he has invited me to go back to Windsor Castle. I can't wait to take Srdjan Givoje, my duet partner, and play "Greensleeves" co-written by me and Henry VIII! It'll be great.

You have also done a couple of very unusual performances in your career. One was for the sequestered jurors in the O.J. Simpson trial. How did that come about? The judge was a fan of my music and asked if I wanted to give a concert because the jurors were bored out of their minds. We were snuck in the backstairs of the courthouse and they gave me a standing ovation. They said, "Keep playing, we're bored, we love your music." I brought some of my CDs for them and I said "I'll autograph them for you – what's your name?" And they were like, "0378," because of course they couldn't tell their real names. I signed all these autographs to numbers.

You're performing again now, but for a while it looked as if you might be finished with music for good. Can you tell us what happened? For years and years I've been playing classical guitar and just taking my hands for granted. About nine years ago I started to notice something strange happening. The middle finger of the right hand just wasn't obeying my brain. It's called task-specific focal dystonia. Overuse wears out the brain circuits and even though you think your brain is telling you to do something, the fingers are not obeying. I was devastated. The guitar is like an extension of my own body.

Yet you were determined to keep playing? I wanted to find a positive solution. I ended up having to get divorced because my husband wanted me to quit music. He said, "Why are you still battling to do it when you're finished?"

That must have been painful. I travelled the world giving performances, but my husband was very resentful of the guitar. He loved the fact that I could play but didn't want me ▶



Above: Liona in her kitchen. 'I like the fact that it's very light and cheerful,' says Liona of the house she rents in Connecticut. Opposite and inset: Pictures of Liona's good friend Prince Philip have pride of place in her living room. 'It's not a romance, let me make that very clear,' she says, adding, 'I just sent him my new album. Hopefully it's playing in Buckingham Palace right now!'

'What seemed like a hideous curse turned out to be a blessing'

to go on tour. He's a lot older than me and he wants a quieter life. I was still motivated to travel and do something creative. He wanted me to be the Beverly Hills wife and the socialite and hang out with Ozzy Osbourne – he lived next door to us – and all that stuff. I almost did become a socialite in Beverly Hills, going from one fundraiser to another.

So it came down to your music or your marriage? He and I are still dear friends but I just felt driven. I felt it was my destiny to do something more with music.

When your marriage ended what did you do? I moved to Miami. That was my middle-aged craziness. I went off to live in Miami fantasizing about Latin music, Latin lovers, the tropical place I was going to live in. But after living there three years and going through four hurricanes, I was a bit disillusioned – and getting bitten by mosquitos all the time! – and decided I would come back to a more civilized part of the world.

Why Connecticut? My producer and friend Joanne Perica lives here. I wanted to live near her, and it's only an hour from New York City by train.

Then you started recording



again. How did you do it given your problems with your hands? I basically reinvented myself. I couldn't play virtuoso classical guitar, but I could still do harmonics and some melodic bits and of course I could write. I thought: "Here's the solution: I've got to learn to sing!" Me, who was thrown out of a choir when I was six.

Why were you thrown out of the choir? Because I couldn't sing, I guess. I toured with Gordon Lightfoot for two years and he used to say, "Liona, you should sing," and I'd say, "Are you kidding? I'm a guitarist – I can't sing for beans." And then last Christmas he came over to my parents' house. When I told him I was singing he said "You're kidding! Finally! Good for you." I can't wait to send him this record so he can hear it – he was so inspiring to me because he was always the one encouraging me to write my own music. You never know – maybe I'll twist his arm and get him to do a song together. I'd sing on one of his songs in a heartbeat if he'd have me! I actually wrote a patriotic Canadian song and I would love if he would do it.

It sounds like you're in a good place, musically speaking. I've discovered a great joy in singing and even though I'll never be a diva – a Celine Dion – my songs don't require that. I can still play the beautiful guitar melodies, and I think I've put more of my life into *Liona Sings Songs of Love* – well, I know I have – than any other record I've ever done. So this focal dystonia that seemed to be an absolute hideous curse turned out to be a blessing because it's opened up another chapter in my life.

It's a very romantic album. Who inspired the lyrics? My imagination! They're not about a particular man, just my fan- ▶



Liona's beautiful gold necklace (right) was a present from then-Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, whom she dated from 1976 to 1983. 'He only gave me two gifts in eight years,' she says with a laugh. 'That [necklace], plus a gold-dipped peanut from [U.S. President] Jimmy Carter's brother Billy.' She recalls their time together with great affection. 'He never wanted to get married, but he wanted me to have his daughter,' she says, adding, 'I spent a lot of time at 24 Sussex Drive, getting smug-

gled in and out of the house wearing wigs so I wouldn't get recognized. It was no scandal – I was single and he was separated – but we just wanted to keep it private.' The couple remained friends after breaking up, and Pierre was supportive when Liona told him she planned to write her autobiography, *In My Own Key*. 'He came to dinner with me and my husband in Montreal and I told him I wanted to write a book. He said, "I'm proud you were my girlfriend. Of course you can tell our story."'



BOTTOM LEFT: GARY HERSHORN/CP





'In a way I am married to my guitar. I'm still searching for my soulmate. If you're out there, let me know!'

tasy man – the one that I have yet to meet!

Tell us about your new guitar album, *Seven Journeys*. It's a more spiritual, new-agey one with beautiful-sounding guitar. I discovered this young genius of a composer in Canada, Peter Bond. When I heard his music I said, "We have to do a record together." Nobody has ever made the guitar sound like you will hear it sound on here.

You've found a way to keep making music – I'm sure you will be an inspiration to others who have encountered similar roadblocks. I want to be an inspiration to middle-aged people – women in particular. Life is shorter than we realize. We all have these dreams, whether it's starting a charity or doing some kind of thing that you always felt inside. I think it's my destiny to show people that even something that I thought was absolutely impossible – sing-

ing – it can happen, it can bring great joy to your life and to other people's lives.

It's wonderful that you can still play guitar too. I guess you would have been heartbroken if you'd had to stop for good. Yes. I really have been in love with the guitar. My ex-husband once said "It's you, me and the guitar in this marriage," and it is true. In a way I kind of am married to my guitar and it's pretty hard to get me away from it. Hopefully somebody will one of these days – well, not away from the guitar, but share the guitar with me. That would be lovely.

It's been five years since your divorce. You haven't met anyone special? I'm still searching for my soulmate. Hey, if you're out there, let me know! **H**

INTERVIEW: GLORIA MARTIN
PHOTOS: ARASH MOALLEMI FOR
HELLO! CANADA
STYLING: WENDY NATALE

Deer sometimes wander past the stream and trees in Liona's backyard (left). Below: The svelte, long-legged singer donned a swimsuit for the making of her new video, 'Baby Maybe.' 'I've never done a bathing suit shoot in my life,' says the irrepressible star, adding, 'Nothing like waiting until you're 60!'

