

## ALLEE WILLIS



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Allee was born and grew up in Detroit where she was not an overly musical child. She tried a hand-me-down violin but never got very far with it. Allee graduated from the University of Wisconsin in 1969 with a degree in journalism and moved to New York. There her first job was writing ad copy, radio spots and publicity releases for Columbia Records where she stayed until 1973.

She left her position at Columbia to sign a recording contract with Epic. In 1974 her album "Childstar" was released. When no second album followed, she took a job as a hat check girl at "Catch A Rising Star" and "Reno Sweeney's" in New York City. There she would be hanging up peoples' coats while the club's entertainer would sing one of the songs she had written without ever realizing that the writer was in the cloak room.

Allee next moved to Los Angeles and signed a publishing contract with Irving Almo Music in 1977, though she "never

wanted to be a songwriter. The only reason I signed was because I couldn't get a recording contract. But I had my first record covered in two hours. Rita Coolidge cut 'Love Me Again' which was the title cut of her album. Then I got eleven records in seven weeks. Herbie Hancock was the first artist to ask me to co-write with him and Patti Labelle was the first artist to record my songs on a regular basis".

Over the past couple of years Allee has written with Hancock, Maurice White, David Foster, Bruce Roberts, David Lasley and Marvin Hamlisch among others. A few of her recent hit records include "Boogie Wonderland" by Earth, Wind and Fire with the Emotions; "Lead Me On" by Maxine Nightingale and "September" also by Earth, Wind and Fire.

Over a year ago Allee began looking for a diversion from her songwriting which, at the time, was becoming too regular and no longer as fulfilling as it once had been. Friends had always commented that her demos sounded like records and she thought about production but wasn't sure enough of herself. Meanwhile at a Wednesday night bowling league she developed a close personal friendship with Lani Hall, who is married to Herb Alpert. Lani wanted to go back and try a more commercial album approach and Herb convinced Allee to take on the project. In Allee's words; "At first it was very hard but then gradually it became an amazing high, like my early days of songwriting. As we worked on the project both Lani and I began to believe more and more in it. We came from totally different ends of the musical rainbow. I came from pop radio and she was doing more of a soft Brazilian thing. It was like Ying and Yang. As it ended up I was real proud of what happened as well as the fantastic relationship that developed between Lani and myself."

When asked about future production plans, Allee notes that; "As soon as I got done with Lani's album I got back into writing and now I feel like I'm on a roll again. I'm real protective of my time and I got very spoiled by the working relationship that developed with Lani. I definitely want to produce again but only if it is an artist that blows me away and someone that I feel I can get along with. I would also have to be able to write a substantial amount of the material to make up for what I'd lose by taking off from writing full time." In questioning Allee further on the kind of artist she would like to produce, she emphasizes that she is somewhat radical in her musical ideas and would like very much to work with an experimental artist. With this in mind, it will be interesting to watch for Allee Willis's next production situation.