



"I'm going to do the whole tour with sleeping pills and vodka," says pop legend Linda Thompson.

## A silenced voice is back — 17 years later

By MICHAEL GILTZ

**L**egendary pop singer Linda Thompson, a Grammy winner once voted top female vocalist by *Rolling Stone*, hasn't been heard from in 17 years — largely, she says, due to spasmodic dysphonia, a malady that prevented her from singing on demand.

But now, Thompson says, she's got a handle on the affliction, a mysterious problem that doctors say could be physical or psychological or both, and has a new album out Tuesday, "Fashionably Late."

She'll also tour in the fall.

"Who knows what it is?" said Thompson of her illness, which was once considered psychosomatic, but is now believed by some to have a physical origin that can be treated with Botox injections in the throat.

"It sort of comes and goes. It's more or less gone now; I can get past it and sing."

But for years, Thompson did so only in pitch darkness.

"The only time I ever sing — much to my son's annoyance

when he's staying in the guest room next door — is in the middle of the night."

The new CD by Thompson, who turns 54 next month, picks up right where her groundbreaking work with ex-husband Richard Thompson left off. In the 1970s and early '80s, the couple recorded a series of classic albums, including "I Want to See the Bright Lights Tonight" and "Pour Down Like Silver."

What happened after, however, is the stuff of music lore.

Following the release of the couple's breakthrough album, "Shoot Out the Lights," in 1982, Richard told his wife he was leaving her. They toured the U.S. together anyway, but Linda didn't deal with that very well.

Often during their shows, she would kick him in the shins or hit him. She stole a car in Canada, trashed a dressing room so thoroughly her manager told her she was "worse than the Sex Pistols."

and sang her heart out.

Thompson says she often thought of herself as just another pretty voice. She only co-wrote two songs with Richard during their career. Her debut solo album, 1985's "One Clear Moment," got better reviews than Richard's album at the time, and she scored three modest hits.

"I did?" Thompson asked, surprised. "Where's the money?"

Reba McEntire sang a song of hers, and Linda Ronstadt, Emmylou Harris and Dolly Parton recorded another in 1987 that won Thompson a Grammy.

She performed at the Grammys that year, though Thompson now admits her illness forced her to lip-sync, "much to Roseanne Cash's horror."

A follow-up album was shelved when Thompson couldn't utter more than a syllable or two on demand, and she all but retired.

Now, all these years later, she plans to go on the road again. How will she cope?

Thompson tested the waters in April at the Village Underground,

supported by her son, Teddy.

At the end of his set, Thompson hushed the crowd with the marvelously caustic "Dear Old Man of Mine," the closing track on her new album.

It was a special moment for everyone there . . . except for Linda.

"I don't remember anything about that," she said. "I remember thinking, 'I'm going to sing with Teddy tonight, I'm really scared, so I ought to take a tranquilizer.'"

"And of course I've got no eyesight, so I took this really strong sleeping pill."

It was one of her first New York performances since her legendary shows almost 20 years earlier.

"I'd sung once before at Fez. But apparently it wasn't as good as [this] time."

"Every other middle-aged musician is cleaning up their act. I'm going to do the whole tour with sleeping pills and vodka."



With ex-husband Richard in their heyday.