

DIANA ROSS INTERVIEW FOR SOUTH AFRICA CONCERTS

We're dissed by her diva-ness

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By Therese Owen

Tonight

It would appear that the more famous a person gets, the more eccentric they become. It would also appear that, as human beings, the closer we get to 60, the more difficult we become.

Take, for instance, my interview with Diana Ross. This icon has pretty much been famous since 1961. That's something like four decades, or 44 years to be exact.

This means not only has she been famous forever, she's also 61, as she was born on March 29 1944. There are very few people who can claim to be a living legend, so I was excited to interview her and was obviously prepared to allow for any eccentricities she may display.

The first display was the times I was given to interview her. Normally international phoners run every 15 minutes, say from 4 to 4.15pm. They are very strict on timing as the interviews are lined up one after the other. My time for Diana Ross was from exactly 4.12 to 4.22. Huh?!?

Does this mean that my watch in Jozi is synchronised exactly with her watch somewhere in deepest darkest America? "The reason," explained the publicist, "is that Ms Ross needs a one minute break between interviews. And she is conducting the interviews at 7am, US time from her own home."

Oh, okay. It kinda makes sense, I guess.

Come the day of the interview, I glanced at the watch in The Star newsroom. It read 4.09pm. My cell read 4.07. I panicked and asked my colleague, Charles de Olim, what time he had.

"My watch is exactly five minutes fast and it reads 4.12 so when your cell says 4.17 you should phone her because then it will be 4.12 exactly," he said, being a real man and taking control of the situation.

In the confusion of getting the phone call time exactly right so that she could have her 60 seconds of rest between her exhausting interviews for the South African media, I completely forgot about the existence of 1026.

At exactly 4.17 on my cellphone I dialled Diana at home. "Hell-lo," whispered a gentle voice. It was something akin to Michael Jackson's voice, but without the creepy undertones.

"Hello, Diana, this is Thérèse Owen from the Star Tonight in Johannesburg. How are you?" Long pause then a confused whispered reply: "Um. Oh. Um. Oh. Hell-lo."

My first question was one for the girls in the office. "How do you maintain your beauty? Do you have the secret to eternal youth?"

She giggled on the other line. "Gosh, thank you for those kind words. I don't actually have a secret. I believe that beauty comes from the inside. You become on the outside what you are on the inside . All you must do is try and be a beautiful person to others and you will always be beautiful."

Hmm, kinda hey-shoo-wow, but famous people from the US do speak like that. And clearly, she ain't gonna give me the gory details about the plastic surgery and the bruising and pain killers afterwards.

I had prepared a list of questions, leaving the meatier ones for later. Gotta warm these stars up, ya know. The second question involved her life as a legend. How does she feel about influencing and inspiring women over the decades to empower themselves?

"I try not to think about it much. I feel grateful that I have touched so many people's lives and that I have been able to inspire women over the years to free themselves. I just get on and do what I do."

Halfway through her explaining how she deals with her iconic status, she just stops. "Oh, there's a beeping on my line which means that the other journalist is phoning so I have to go. Okay, thank you very much. Goodbye." And plonk! she was gone. What the ...? That was like six minutes or something!

A myriad thoughts run through my head. Have I just been dissed by the Diana Ross? Is she just eccentric? Can she not handle new modern technology and panics if she hears someone else trying to get through? And what about my meaty questions that were still to come?

Oh well, there is no accounting for living legends who are close on 60.

- Diana Ross will be performing at the Unite of the Stars, Sandton Convention Centre on November 9 and the Bellville Velodrome, Cape Town on November 11.