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SUZANNE VEGA

"I suppose that the things that interest me most are character and place," says Suzanne Vega, the New York-based recording artist whose distinctive songwriting talent and eclectic musical approach have brought her both national and international acclaim in the two short years since the release of her stunning debut A&M album in April of 1985.

"I'm always curious about the atmosphere that people come from, and not so much what they do but why they do it," she stresses. If striving for getting beneath the surface and uncovering those private feelings and secret thoughts that all people harbor within themselves is a theme that seems to recur throughout many of her songs, that's only understandable, since she is someone who knows all too well that our perception of things can often be quite different than what they actually are.

To be sure, there has been, since virtually the beginning of her professional career, much more to Suzanne Vega than meets the eye. Watching her performing alone on the small stages of various Greenwich Village clubs several years ago, with nothing but her own acoustic guitar serving as musical accompaniment, her earliest supporters could certainly be forgiven if, in their enthusiasm, they mistook her for the kind of traditional folk singer she never really claimed, nor sought, to be.

"When I first started playing in clubs in the early Eighties," she recalls, "my perspective must have seemed very strange. At the time, I wasn't quite sure where I fit in, with music, with the world. I knew that I was aiming for something, but I wasn't really sure what it was. I knew it wasn't folk, necessarily, although there were a lot of things that I liked about early folk—Woody Guthrie, Cisco Houston, for instance—because it was real and you could tell it was real. It wasn't real for me personally—I certainly didn't know anything about freight trains—but you could tell from listening that these people had been there, and that there was no pretentiousness about them. But after I started performing regularly, suddenly there was all this press calling me a folk singer, even though I didn't think that a song like, say "Cracking," could really be construed as a folk song. After all, it wasn't exactly 'Wild Mountain Thyme.'"

Suzanne's "perspective" ("I think it's probably my favorite word right now," she says) at the time was that of a young woman barely into her twenties, a woman who, though she hardly looked it, had been raised in the tough neighborhoods of New York City, who'd been a serious dance student for almost a decade, and who was working in theatre while majoring in English at Bard College. Although Suzanne grew up in a home where the tastes in music leaned heavily towards folk ("When I was young, the whole aura around singer/songwriters like Dylan, Paul Simon and Leonard Cohen was very strong") and jazz ("I remember listening to a lot of Astrud Gilberto and Brazilian music"), and as a teenager had done some performing at church basement-type coffeehouses where "they'd give you a plate of brownies and a cup of juice after you played," she is quick to point out that her philosophy in regard to songwriting was profoundly influenced by a rock 'n roll concert by former Velvet Underground leader Lou Reed that she witnessed in late 1979.

"At the time," she notes, "everybody around me was into punk and new wave, but I just wasn't paying much attention to it. I barely even knew who Lou Reed was—I remember asking the guy who wanted to take me if he had any hits, and he said, "Walk on the Wild Side," and I think I went because I at least knew that one song. He was being really aggressive and hostile towards the audience, and I just thought, "What is going on here?" But there were a few songs that he did that night that really got to me, songs like "Heroin" and "Caroline Says Part II" that I found I just couldn't stop thinking about. And the concert really wound up having a great effect on me, because afterwards I didn't see songs, or songwriting, in the same light. For the first time it occurred to me that you could write a song using only one chord and say anything you wanted to over it, and someone just might listen to it. Before that, I always felt that songs had to make sense, have some kind of narrative, be some-
how traditional in structure. But Lou Reed was writing in a very different way, and about things that I knew about. So it was a shock of recognition and realization at the same time—that you could not only write a song any way you felt like, but that you could also write about anything you felt like.

As both her writing style and self-confidence developed and grew, Suzanne began to regularly venture down to Greenwich Village, and at clubs like the Speakeasy and the legendary Folk City she found a sympathetic and nurturing environment made up of musicians and listeners who shared her belief in the integrity of "intelligent music that takes risks." She quickly began to draw sizeable audiences and rave notices for her shows in New York and Boston and, as the breadth of her songwriting skills became increasingly apparent and her musical horizons expanded, the simple tag of "folk singer" ceased to fit. "One of the most distintcively original performers in the entire pop realm" was the way one local critic put it—a description that seemed much better suited for the author of such far field compositions as the rap-like "Cracking," the jazz-tinged "Freeze Tag," and the ballad-styled "The Queen and the Soldier."

These songs, as well as such stellar works as the reflective "Marlene on the Wall," the atmospheric and dusky "Small Blue Thing," and the graceful, free-falling "Some Journey," can all be found on Suzanne's self-titled first album, which was carefully and sympathetically produced by engineer (and, along with Ron Fierstein, co-manager) Steve Addabbo and former Patti Smith Group guitarist Lenny Kaye. On it, Suzanne's voice and guitar were sensitively complemented by the elements of a full-scale electric band, and the experience ultimately led to her decision to tour with a complete backup group. "You get a sense of energy with a band that I never quite understood until I was playing inside of one," she says, "There's a rough edge that I simply couldn't get on my own that I think comes through now, and I'm happy for that."

While the Suzanne Vega LP received uniformly excellent reviews and a significant commercial response in the United States—given the strict formats of most American radio stations, and the general climate for music that may initially seem to be somewhat, er, left of center, Suzanne feels that "it's actually done much better than I thought it ever would"—the album was an overwhelming and unqualified success in Europe. "In some ways, I wasn't all that surprised about doing well over there," she admits. "Many of the people I like—Leonard Cohen, Laurie Anderson—have always tended to do better in Europe, so it kind of makes sense to me." In England, in fact, Suzanne has become quite a major star, to the extent that a British tour last fall included two sold-out performances at London's fabled Albert Hall, and a half-hour BBC television show culled from footage of the concerts drew an estimated audience of over two and a half million viewers. "I spent a summer in England in 1979," she says, "and I was really very inspired by the country's style. I remember wishing that I could somehow make an impact there. So in many ways, the response I've gotten in England has been very, very gratifying."

Still, becoming a star—and, inevitably, a celebrity—is not something that Suzanne is sure she's necessarily comfortable with, at least not yet. And in an age of big stars possessing even bigger egos, Suzanne Vega's impressive talents as a singer, songwriter, and performer are perhaps matched only by her equally impressive perspective on the trappings of fame. While her brand new album, Solitude Standing, featuring such stand-out tracks as the provocative "Luka," the playful "Tom's Diner," the sinewy "Night Vision," and the foreboding "In the Eye," is certain to bring her not only more critical support but also a more expansive popularity than ever before, Suzanne Vega remains a refreshingly unassuming artist whose dedication is first and foremost, to the work at hand.

"When I'm performing at a concert and I finish my set and I see people getting all excited, I always feel a bit ambivalent," she confesses. "There's a part of me that says, 'Be happy for this,' and another part that just feels distracted, that wants to say to the audience, 'Hey, calm down, alright?' In New York, if you stand up and they just look at you, you know things are going well. But to go to Ireland and have two thousand people screaming and howling is very different. My first response is that I couldn't possibly be that big a deal, and that they should all sit down. I mean, I hate big deals. Don't get me wrong, though," she laughs. "I like knowing that people are listening to my songs. And I do like being appreciated."

The feeling, one suspects, from her growing audience, is more than mutual.

—Billy Altman
LUKA
Music and Lyrics by Suzanne Vega

*Recorded a half step higher.

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1. My name is Lukash.
cause I'm clumsy.
I live on the second floor.

2. I think it's lukesh
cause I'm o.k.
May-be it's be-cause I'm crazy.
talk too loud.
If you ask, that's what I'll say.

3. Yes, I think you've seen me before.
And it's not your bus-ness an-y-way.
I live up stairs from you.

4. I try not to act too proud.
If you hear

They only I guess I'd

some-thing late-at night,
hit un-till you cry.
like to be a- lone,
some kind of trou-ble, some kind of fight,
that you don't ask why.
with noth-ing bro- ken, noth-ing thrown.

If you hear

They only I guess I'd

some-thing late-at night,
hit un-till you cry.
like to be a- lone,
some kind of trou-ble, some kind of fight,
that you don't ask why.
with noth-ing bro- ken, noth-ing thrown.
just don't ask me what it was. And they only hit

until you cry. After that you don't ask

why. You just don't argue anymore, you just don't argue anymore.
SOLITUDE STANDING

Lyrics by Suzanne Vega
Music by Suzanne Vega, Michael Visceglia,
Anton Sanko, Marc Shulman
and Stephen Ferrera

Moderately bright
N.C.

1. Sol-i-tude stands by the window. She turns her head as I
2. Sol-i-tude stands in the doorway. She's struck once again by her
3. turn to the crowd as they're watching. They're sitting all together in the
walk in the room. I can see by her eyes she's been waiting,
black silhouette, by her long, cool stare and her silence.
I wanted to be in there among them.

I

standing in the slant of the sudden, I remember each time we've met, and she
see how their eyes are gathered into one. Then she

turns to me with her

hand extended. Her palm is split with a flower with a flame.

4th time to Coda II

Am9
And she says, "I've come to set a twisted thing straight."

And she says, "I've..."
come to lighten this dark heart."

And she takes my wrist. I feel her imprint of fear.

And I said, "I never thought of finding you here."

And I
NIGHT VISION

Lyrics by Suzanne Vega
Music by Suzanne Vega and Anton Sanko

Moderately bright

Guitar — Am add2 (capo 2nd fret)
Piano — Bm add2

Em7(no 3rd)
F#m7(no 3rd)

G6
A6

Fadd#4
Gadd#4

E7sus4
F#7sus4
F#7

Am add2
Bm add2

Em7(no 3rd)
F#m7(no 3rd)

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Half the world in sweetness, the other in fear.

When the darkness takes you with her

The table, the guitar,

Hand across your face, don't give in too

all will blend to-

quickly. Find the thing she's erased.

gather when the day light has passed.
Find the line, find the shape through the grain.

Find the outline and things will tell you their name.

Now I watch you falling into
sleep,

watch your fist un-

curl a - gainst the

sheet,

watch your lips fall o - pen and your eyes

dim in blind faith.
Am(add2)  
Bm(add2)

Em7(no 3rd)  
F#m7(no 3rd)

Am(add2)  
Bm(add2)

I would shelter you and keep you in

Em7(no 3rd)  
F#m7(no 3rd)

Fadd#4  
Gadd#4

G6  
A6

light, but I can only teach you

Fadd#4  
Gadd#4

E7sus4  
F#7sus4  
F#7

Am(add2)  
Bm(add2)

night vision,

Em7(no 3rd)  
F#m7(no 3rd)

Am(add2)  
Bm(add2)

Em7(no 3rd)  
F#m7(no 3rd)

night vision, night
IN THE EYE

Lyrics by Suzanne Vega
Music by Suzanne Vega and Marc Shulman

Fast
Guitar (capo 3rd fret)  E(no 3rd)
E7/6(no 3rd)
E7(no 3rd)

Piano  G(no 3rd)
G7/6(no 3rd)
G7(no 3rd)

If you were to kill me now, right here, I would still look you in the eye...

And I would burn myself into your memory as long as

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you were still alive.

I would live inside of you.
I'd make you wear me like a scar.
I would burn myself into your memory and run through...
E(no 3rd)
G(no 3rd)
ev'rything you were still alive.

E7/6(no 3rd)
G7/6(no 3rd)

Fsus2
Absus2
I would not run, I would not turn, I would not hide.

G(no 3rd)
Bb(no 3rd)

Fsus2
Absus2

G(no 3rd)
Bb(no 3rd)

Fsus2
Absus2

G(no 3rd)

I would not run, I would not turn, I would not hide.

G(no 3rd)
Bb(no 3rd)
hide.

In the eye.

To Coda
Brightly

If language were liquid it would be rushing in.

Instead here we are in silence more eloquent than any word could ever be. These words are too
solid; they don't move fast enough

to catch the blur in the brain that flies by and is

gone, and is gone, and is

gone, gone, gone, and is
gone.

I'd like to meet you in a timeless, placeless place, somewhere out of context and beyond all consequences. Let's go

(Words are too solid; they don't move fast enough back to the building on Little West Twelfth. It is not far away, and the
to catch the blur in the brain that
river is there, and the sun and the spaces are all laying low, and we'll
flies by and is gone.)
sit in the silence that comes rushing in and is gone,
and is gone.
gone, gone, and is gone.
I won't use words again. They don't mean what I meant; they don't say what I said.

It's just the crust of the meaning with realms underneath never touched, never stirred, never even moved through. If language were liquid it would be rushing in.
Instead here we are in a silence more eloquent than any word could ever be, and is gone, gone, gone, gone, and is gone, gone, gone.

Repeat and fade

32
CALYPSO

Music and Lyrics by Suzanne Vega

Moderately slow, in 2

Guitar — E(7)
(capo 3rd fret) o o xx

Piano — G(7)

\[ \text{E(7)} \]
\[ \text{G(7)} \]

My name is Calypso and I have lived alone.

I live on an island and I waken to the dawn.

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A(no3rd)  A7/6(no3rd)  A(no3rd)  A7/6(no3rd)
C(no3rd)  C7/6(no3rd)  C(no3rd)  C7/6(no3rd)

long time ago, I watched him struggle with the sea.

E(7)
G(7)

I knew that he was drowning and I brought him into me.

Asus4  Asus4  Aadd4  Cadd4
Csus4  Cadd4

Now today, come morning light,

Cmaj7  Emaj7  F#m7  Am7

he sails away. After one last
night I let him go.

My name is Calypso. My garden overflows.

Thick and wild and hidden is the sweetness there that grows.

My hair, it blows long as I sing into the wind.
I tell of nights where I could taste the salt on his skin...

salt of the waves and of tears. And

though he pulled away, I kept him here

for years. Now I
let him go.

My name is Calypso. I have let him go.

In the dawn he sails away to be gone forever more.

And the waves will take him in again, but he'll know their ways now.
I will stand upon the shore with a clean heart and my song in the wind. The sand will sting my feet and the sky will burn. It's a lonely time ahead.

I do not ask him
to return. I let him go. I let him go.
far away with pictures in your eyes of coffee shops and morning streets in the blue and silent sunrise. But night is the cathedral where we recognized the sign. We strangers know each other now as part of the whole design. Oh,
— hold me like a baby that will not fall asleep.

Curl me up inside you and let me hear you through the heat. Oh.

You're the jester of this courtyard with a smile like a girl's, dis-
tracted by the women with the dimples and the curls, by the
pretty and the mischievous, by the timid and the blessed, by the
blowing skirts of ladies who promise to gather you to their breast. Oh,
You have

hands of raining water and that earring in your ear.

The

wisdom on your face denies the number of your years, with the

fingers of the potter and the laughing tale of the fool, the ar-
ranger of disorder with your strange and simple rules. Yeah,

now I've met me another spinner of strange and guazy threads with a

long and slender body and a bump upon the head. Oh-

With a long and slender body and the sweetest, softest
hands, and we'll blow away forever soon and go on to different lands.

And please do not ever look for me, but with me you will stay.

And you will hear yourself in song, blowing by one

day. But now hold me like a baby that will not fall a-
sleep. Curl me up inside you and let me hear you through the heat.

Oh, oh.
WOODEN HORSE
(CASPAR HAUSER'S SONG)

Lyrics by Suzanne Vega
Music by Suzanne Vega, Michael Visceglia,
Anton Sanko, Marc Shulman
and Stephen Ferrera

Moderately bright

I came out of the darkness

holding one thing:

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Esus4 E F#7sus4/E F#7add4/E

A sus4/E Aadd2/E G#madd4 G#m

Esus4 E F#7sus4/E F#7add4/E

a small white wooden horse

A sus4/E Aadd2/E G#madd4 G#m

I'd been holding inside.
And when I'm dead,

if you could tell them this:

that what was wood became alive,

what was wood became alive.
Esus4   E
And in the night the walls disappeared.

A\sus4  /E Aadd2/E
In the day they returned.

Esus4   E
“I want to be a rider like my father”
were the only words I could say.

live.

And I fell under a moving piece of sun. (Freedom.)
holding one thing.

I know I have this power.

I'm afraid I may be killed.

And when I'm dead,
if you could
tell them this:

that what was wood
became alive,

what was wood
became alive.

1. Cmaj7

Repeat and fade

(Drums fade out)
IRONBOUND/FANCY POULTRY

Lyrics by Suzanne Vega
Music by Suzanne Vega and Anton Sanko

Moderately bright

Am  Am9(no 3rd)  F add #4  F sus #4 sus2

In the

Am  Am9(no 3rd)  Am  Am9(no 3rd)  F add #4

iron-bound section near Avenue L, where the
beams and bridges cut the light on the ground into little triangles, and the

Am  Am9(no 3rd)  F add #4

see what you sell, the clouds so low, the morning so slow as the
rails run round through the rust and heat, the light and sweet cof-

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wires cut through the sky.

The fee col-or of her skin.

Bound up in iron and wire and fate, watch-ing her walk-

him up to the gate in front of the iron-bound school-yard.

Kids will grow like weeds on a fence. She says they look for the light. They iron-bound section near Avenue L, where the Portuguese women come to
try to make sense. They come up through the cracks like the grass on the tracks.

She touches him goodbye. She stops at the stall.

And into the street, fingers the ring, opens her purse, feels a long...
*Pianists: Omit vocal melody for next 12 bars.
Fancy poultry parts sold here.
Breasts and thighs and
hearts.
Backs are cheap and
wings are nearly...

2.

wings are nearly free."
free.

free.

free.

Nearly

Near-ly

Nearly

Repeat and fade
TOM'S DINER

Music and Lyrics
by Suzanne Vega

Moderately fast
(A cappella)

1. I am sitting in the morning at the
always nice to see you," says the
open up the paper, there's a
woman on the outside looking

dinner on the corner. I am waiting at the coun-
man behind the counter to the woman who has come_
story of an actor who had died while he was drink-
inside. Does she see me? No, she does not really see_

for the man to pour the coffee. And he fills it only half-
in. She is shaking her umbrella. And I look the other way_
me, 'cause she sees her own reflection. And I'm trying not to no -

way, and before I even argue, he is
as they are kissing their helmet, and I'm pres -
scope and looking for the fun
ices when I'm

looking out the window at some body coming in_
tending not to see them and instead I pour the milk_
feeling someone watching me and so I raise my head_
straightening her stockings, her hair has gotten wet_

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2. "It is

A tempo

rain, it will con- tin- ue through the morn- ing. As I’m lis-
t’ning to the bells of the cathed- ral, I am

A tempo

thinking of your voice and of the mid-night pic- nic

once up-on a time be- fore the rain be- gan.

And I fin- ish up my cof- fee, and it’s

time to catch the train. Da da da da da da da-

TOM'S DINER
(REPRISE)

Music by Suzanne Vega

Moderately fast

Fm 4fr.

Db6 6fr.

Ab 8fr.

Gb6-5 9fr.

Fm 4fr.

C7-9 8fr.

1 - 4.

5. D. S. and fade 

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Tom's Diner
Luka
Ironbound/Fancy Poultry
In the Eye
Night Vision
Solitude Standing
Calypso
Language
Gypsy
Wooden Horse (Caspar Hauser's Song)
Tom's Diner (Reprise)