

Lita Roza - Presenting Lita Roza (1955)

Written by bluesever

Friday, 16 August 2019 14:26 -

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A1 Make Love To Me A2 Tell Me When We'll Meet Again A3 How Much Is That Doggie In The Window A4 Stars Fell On Alabama B1 Blacksmith Blues B2 High Noon B3 Half As Much B4 Allentown Jail Ted Heath And His Music (A1, B1, B4) Johnny Douglas And His Orchestra (A2, A3, B3) Peter Knight Singers (A2) Mantovani And His Orchestra (A4) Reg Owen And His Orchestra (B2) Lita Roza - Vocals

Lita Roza was born Lilian Patricia Lita Roza on March 14, 1926 in Liverpool to Elizabeth Anne and Francis Vincent Roza, a Spanish marine engineer and part-time pianist at a local nightclub. The eldest of seven children, she auditioned as a dancer at the age of 12 in a pantomime to help support the family, eventually working up to performing with the comedian Ted Ray and actress Noel Gordon in the show Black Velvet. Because life was becoming too dangerous in London during the blitz of 1940, her family wanted her back in Liverpool. She turned to singing on her return and managed to get a job as a resident singer in a Merseyside club called The New Yorker. Shortly afterwards, she signed to become a singer with the Harry Roy Orchestra, one of Britain's leading wartime big bands, although when Roy was booked to tour the Middle East, the young Lita Roza was not allowed to join them, being only 17 years old.

At just 18, she retired from show business, marrying James Shepherd Holland, one of the Canadian servicemen who was stationed in the U.K.; they moved to Miami. The marriage did not last, however, and after the war she returned to Britain, finding work with another top bandleader of the time, Ted Heath, alongside Dickie Valentine and Denis Lotis. As many of her contemporaries, she combined working with a big band with a career as a solo singer, and in 1953, she recorded a version of Patti Page's "How Much Is That Doggie in the Window," which topped the charts in April for one week, easily beating off the challenge of the Page version, and only the eighth number one song in the then recently introduced British charts. Despite its success, Roza hated the song and would never perform it in public.

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She left the Ted Heath band and married Ron Hughes, a trumpet player. She was voted Top Girl Singer of 1951-1952 in the Melody Maker dance band polls and won the Top Female Singer category in New Musical Express from 1951-1955 consecutively. Another couple of minor solo hits followed, "Hey There" and "Jimmy Unknown," but despite releasing a total of 55 singles and four albums on Decca -- Presenting Lita Roza, Listening in the After-Hours, Love Is the Answer, and Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea -- her record sales were halted by the arrival of rock & roll and in the mid-'50s she concentrated on television work (including her own show Lita Roza Sings and several appearances with Ted Heath and on the new TV pop show Six Five Special, the only pop show on TV in the mid-'50s) and working in cabarets around the world including in Australia, New Zealand, and the Flamingo Hotel in Las Vegas.

She was asked to join a series of Ted Heath reunion concerts in 1982 along with Denis Lotis and Don Lusher and most of the original musicians from the band. In 2001, Roza was honored as the first artist with a bronze disc placed on the Wall of Fame in Matthew Street, opposite the Cavern Club, which featured all the acts from Liverpool who had achieved a number one to date including everyone from Frankie Vaughan, Michael Holiday, and the Beatles to Sonia, Mel C, and Atomic Kitten. Throughout the late '90s and into the 21st century, Universal Music, which owns the rights to Roza's Decca recordings, released several compilations of her songs as well as her final album, Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea, and Ted Heath Singles 1951-1953. She gave her final performance on Radio Merseyside in November 2002. Lita Roza died at her home in London on August 14, 2008; she was 82 years old. ---Sharon Mawer, allmusic.com

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