

Line-up changes to the Silk Cut Festival bill pave the way for a return visit from Canada's first lady of country, CARROLL BAKER. Keith Newton looks at her career to date.

VERSATILE CARROLL IS BACK AT WEMBLEY

THE vast breadth of versatility and the great depth of feeling that Canadian songstress Carroll Baker brings to her work is ably summed up in just three of the numbers that she regularly includes in her highly entertaining stage performances.

She creates a highly sensuous atmosphere with her accomplished rendering of "I'm So Excited" which makes the efforts of the song's composers, The Pointer Sisters, sound somewhat innocent by comparison.

The fire of the woman-of-the-world is banked down and the transformation into romantic innocence is complete for Conway Twitty's "I've Never Been This Far Before". The longing to be touched, but the diffidence and awe in which she holds her would-be lover is plain to see in a stunning interpretation that leaves other versions of the song trailing in its wake.

Carroll's whispered introduction to Kris Kristofferson's prayerful ballad "Why Me Lord" sets the scene for yet another complete vocal transition. She goes easily from physical longing to a powerful sense of spiritual humility that somehow defies written description. There is a real need to experience the live tribute to appreciate just how much goes into the performance.

It is small wonder that she has won virtually every award that the Canadian country music industry can bestow and is currently, once-again, Female Vocalist of the Year, an award conferred upon her by the Canadian Academy of Country Music at a ceremony late last year.

Sparkling

But great latitude of vocal prowess is not the sole reason for her success. Much is due to the sparkling personality she exhibits, both in her on and off stage moments. Like most top-rated artistes she is a wide open individual radiating an almost vulnerable charm that can bring a heart-warming smile or a deep sense of hurt at some casual remark.

Unlike some other artistes, whose life seems to lurch from one crisis to another, she has little turmoil in her life. Indeed she has a very clear picture of her priorities.

She sums it up thus: "I want to be the best I can possibly be at everything I do," she says, "That is the best at being a mother, a wife — and those things come first with me — and the best at my career."

Carroll's favourite times are those spent with daughter Candace and husband John Beaulieu. Away from the bright lights, the family live a quiet life, and in the community of Guelph, Ontario they are regarded as 'the folks next door'.

She comments "I don't think I've changed at all as far as personality goes. I have a better business sense though. My husband and I have still basically the same friends I had before I got into the business. At home I'm just mommy. I don't have a cleaning lady or maid. I prefer to do the work myself!"

The importance of her marriage is well underlined by the fact that, come April, the Beaulieus will have been in that blissful state for eighteen years.

Superstitious

Carroll acknowledges to being ultra-superstitious. So much so that whenever she encounters a new one it gets added to a list that would probably fill this entire page if we cared to run through them. Nobody whistles backstage when this lady is on the bill!

It seems a little strange to recall that as a child, Canada's first lady of country, didn't like the music at all. She grew up in a family as the youngest of six children who were all involved in country. Carroll says "Country was all that I heard. I got too much of it and I just didn't appreciate it."

Her change of heart grew out of a feeling of homesickness when she moved away from her birthplace, the tiny fishing village of Port Medway, to Ontario.



● Carroll Baker

new-found success. "I tried hard to convince myself that it was actually all happening. I just figured someone had paid for it to get there (on the charts)," she confides.

The stay in the charts led to TV work. On her first outing with the medium she sang the previously mentioned "I've Never Been This Far Before". The result was electric and literally show-stopping. TV bosses and recording executives beat a path to her door.