



SHARLEEN SPITERI, LEAD SINGER OF TEXAS  
PHOTO BY JULIAN BROAD

# Scot's Honor

Texas front woman Sharleen Spiteri talks intimidating accents, fighting with celebrities, and 35 years in the music business.

By SARAH FONES



“I was like, okay, it’s time. We’ve established who we are and what I stand for. Now I step forward. But, you know, it took almost 10 years.”

Sharleen Spiteri, lead singer of the cult Glaswegian pop band Texas, made it big before the advent of voyeuristic paparazzi videos and starry-eyed social media sightings. It was 1989, and Texas had just released their debut album, *Southside*. The first single from that record, “I Don’t Want a Lover,” hit number eight on the U.K. Hot Singles Chart and peaked at number 77 on the *Billboard* 200 stateside. (Texas has currently sold 40 million records worldwide, had three number one albums, and eight top 10 albums on the U.K. Albums Chart.)

Then in her early twenties, Spiteri appeared in the video for “I Don’t Want a Lover” with a baggy denim jacket, a matte red lip, and a shaggy, androgynous coif. Even if people didn’t yet know her name, they knew the song. “The thing that I remember most was guys [would] shout, ‘Do you still *not want a lover?*’” Spiteri says, mimicking the gruff, semi-teasing come-on. “And that’s kind of another means of recognition. I don’t remember people saying, ‘Oh my God, are you Sharleen Spiteri?’ If somebody says to me”—she lowers her voice and adopts the stereotypically ominous sound of someone in law enforcement—“Are you Sharleen Spiteri? I think I’m gonna get arrested.”

Thus far Spiteri’s avoided time behind bars, but she’s known to get mouthy, sometimes even on camera. Most infamously, perhaps, was a run-in with Paris Hilton at a jam-packed aughts-era *Vanity Fair* party. Spiteri espied Hilton dancing atop her friends’ jacket and told her to get off, to no avail. By her own account, Spiteri then took the straw from her drink, sucked in some liquid, and blew it in Hilton’s face. Someone caught the moment the two subsequently ended up nose to nose on camera. Spiteri then used profane language to warn Hilton what she would do to her, a threat made ostensibly more menacing in Spiteri’s thick Scottish brogue.

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In fact, the singer has long considered the strong accent she shares with her bandmates a layer of protection and occasionally, impenetrability. “You can create this wall, you know, if you thought someone was being a bit weird and a bit funny with something, or being a bit smarmy,” Spiteri explains. “Instantly, we’d broaden our accent and people would be like, what’s going on? And we would shut ranks.” Despite being Texas’s lead vocalist and (formerly) sole female member, Spiteri never felt especially vulnerable or overly scrutinized in the public eye. She believes the way she talked, coupled with her traditionally masculine wardrobe, mostly kept the riffraff away.

As a teenager, Spiteri leaned into punk and the Buffalo Girl aesthetic. She recalls tearing up rags, donning mannish coats, and having her mother sew petticoats to wear beneath a massive dirndl skirt. She listened to Echo and the Bunnymen, Dexys Midnight Runners, and the Clash. Blondie was beloved for a different reason. “I always used to love that Debbie Harry really enunciated. Like, her diction’s perfect. I can hear every single word that she says, even when you watch her sing. She literally says the words—the clarity’s unbelievable.” Spiteri, ever aware of her own accent, claims it’s helped her tremendously as a songwriter.

Public perception of Spiteri and the band itself changed in 1997 with the release of the album *White on Blonde*. Propelled in large part by the smash single “Say What You Want,” the album remains Texas’s best-selling record to date and the only one to chart at number one in the U.K. The video for the radio-friendly “Say What You Want” heralded a departure for the band. In it, Spiteri appears alone, strumming her guitar in a futuristic-looking space lair of sorts. Gone are the biker boots and black jeans, swapped for a form-fitting sapphire tee and trainers. That year also marked the first time Spiteri was photographed on her own. Previously, the band had always insisted on shooting at least two of its members. “I was like, okay, it’s time. We’ve established who we are and what I stand for,” Spiteri says. “Now I step forward. But, you know, it took almost 10 years.”

Months later, Texas collaborated with an unlikely partner: Wu-Tang Clan. Together, the two groups remixed the previous year’s hit, creating “Say What You Want (All Day, Every Day)” with Wu-Tang’s RZA and Method Man on vocals. This version likewise charted in the top 10. If the collaboration succeeded, Spiteri believes it’s because they were coming from the same place, values wise. It wasn’t about hype, or money, and it would probably pique discussions. Standards were high and the music was made with longevity in mind. “That was a great thing about RZA—he could see it. He could see where it could go. At the end of the day, we came together, and I think we just made a great record. And it did elevate our street cred, I would say,” Spiteri laughs.

In early 2024, Spiteri and her bandmates will embark on a new tour across New Zealand, Australia, and the U.K. It will follow approximately 18 months of nonstop, post-lockdown shows, including a stint at Glastonbury this past summer. Then there’s



Texas: “Keep on Talking,” (official video trailer).



the new album coming out—a “reimagining of all our songs, just on vocal and a piano,” Spiteri says, recorded with Southern soul legend Spooner Oldham in Muscle Shoals, Alabama. Marking 35 years hasn’t made the singer especially nostalgic, but she’ll concede that the music industry may have been more amenable to new talent when she was just starting out. Now, Spiteri says, record companies will tell you to “go and make a record like Ed Sheeran. And you’re like, Ed Sheeran’s already made that record. Ed Sheeran exists. Why are you going to tell some new band, some new, young writers, to just go and write records that sound like that?” Music’s become incredibly corporate, Spiteri believes, with lawyers and accountants calling the shots. “Probably people that have never bought a record in their life. I know that because I have to have conversations with most of them. And they haven’t

got—to put it very politely—a fucking clue what they’re talking about.” Spiteri readily admits that she’s not in the same boat as a would-be Ed Sheeran, thank God. She’s been successful for over three decades, and with that success comes quite a bit of freedom. Spiteri can easily walk away from an asinine industry conversation and simply go make her record. In some respects, it’s not unlike getting older. Whereas a young Spiteri secretly hoped people thought she was cool, now she no longer cares what others think. “It makes no difference in my life. And that is such a freeing feeling. It’s such an amazing feeling, to just be free of all that shit. Now I feel liberated. Now I feel invincible almost.”

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