



BEVERLEY HILLS TO RURAL SUSSEX

Ursula Stone reflects on the glamorous rock 'n' roll lifestyle she once led and tells Jo Rothery that she now lives for her art

Evocative oil paintings with a hint of mystery and exquisite life drawings are at the very heart of multi-talented artist Ursula's existence nowadays.

It's a far cry from the hedonistic days of the late Sixties and early Seventies when she rubbed shoulders with many legendary figures during the heyday of rock 'n' roll.

That exciting lifestyle may be in the past, but Ursula has retained her essential glamour, lively sense of fun, and enormous energy, now devoted to her painting.

It's easy to see why famous singer/songwriter Van Morrison was in love with her, and that she was a member of the party-loving set who hung out with the likes of The Kinks, The Troggs, Benny King, The Animals, and Jimmy Hendrix.

She was even part of the John and Yoko scene, living in a cottage on their estate in Berkshire and trusted to take care of their domestic arrangements primarily.

She is happy to chat about those days, but were they all about 'sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll'?

"I think there was a lot of that, but I was married," Ursula says with a laugh. "There was plenty of rock 'n' roll, but it was more about lots of parties, lots of friends. Of course, there were drugs,

but I wasn't into that scene.

"It was crazy at times, especially when we were living in LA. The fabulous Beverley Hills lifestyle, incredible houses, driving around in limos. That was just the way we all lived.

"One day I was buying things in a wholefood store, and some guy came up to me and said 'that's a great product.' He asked me if I was English and told me that he was 'in a little band.' He was one of the Beachboys!"

Ursula's life has never been ordinary or conventional, and although rock 'n' roll played such a large part for many years, art has been her rock since she was a child, a sound foundation that kept her grounded wherever life took her and is now her main focus.

Born into an artistic environment with a long family history of artists and painters, she is the great grand-daughter of the renowned painter Ludwig Fahrenkrog whose work was admired by Hitler.

"All my family have been artists, that's my history, and I have been painting and drawing since I was a child," she says.

"My great grandfather, Ludwig Fahrenkrog, attended the Berlin Royal Art Academy and taught at the School of Arts and Crafts in Bremen from



Main image: Beautiful landscape oil painting by Ursula; Left: Ursula when she was younger; Right: Beverly Hills



Ursula in her studio; Right: John Lennon; Ursula relaxing in her garden; 'Presence' by Ursula; Ursula's admirer Van Morrison

◀ 1898 to 1931. Herr Hitler wanted him to be the state painter, but he refused that and was put on Hitler's blacklist.

"My grandfather, a politician, was on the same blacklist - they both fell out of favour with Herr Hitler.

"My great grandfather, who went on to be a professor in Rome, had five daughters, and they all drew or painted. My mother started as an illustrator but moved on to painting portraits and eventually landscapes, then art restoration. I'm the eldest of six children, and we've all been creative.

"That's my history, art came down to me from my mother's side, and I always drew from my very early days. I went to a new progressive school in Yorkshire, which did lots of art and pottery. I did mostly pottery as that was the only warm place in the whole school!"

Ursula's father was not artistic, and his work as a teacher then psychologist took the family to America before they returned to England, living on the Wirral in Cheshire before moving on again to Ireland. Ursula did a foundation course at Belfast College of Art, and that's where she met Van Morrison.

"I had a different name then, Ursula Graham White, and years later a friend called me to say

there was a whole thing about me in a Sunday Times magazine supplement, using that name. It was about part of a book on Van Morrison, and that's where I discovered he had been in love with me!"

It wasn't Van Morrison that Ursula married, though. Her first husband was Mick Cox, a guitarist who was one of Van's best friends. The couple moved to London, and she studied ceramics at Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts. Her talent for drawing came to the fore, and she became a sought-after graphic designer working in London and Dublin.

"Meeting up with musicians started when I was at art school in Belfast," Ursula recalls. "That's when I became friends with Van Morrison, who was a little bit famous but not well-known at the time. We were great friends and hung out together, and I loved being part of that circle of musicians at that time and made a lot of different friends. Mick Cox, Van's guitar player, became my first husband.

"Just after Mick and I married, he was asked by Van to go to the United States. At the same time, he was asked to play with Eire Apparent, an Irish band he'd played with before, who was going to be the support act on a Jimmy Hendrix tour of America. He went out there, taking the place of



a guitarist who had been thrown out of Canada because of drugs, so he couldn't do the tour.

"I followed later, and we lived in the Chelsea Hotel in New York. It was THE rock 'n' roll hotel and a lot of people lived there all the time - it was very down at heel!

"I came back to London for a while, but then Mick went on another tour, and I returned to the States where we lived in Los Angeles and dived into that lifestyle."

Eventually, Ursula and Mick split up, and she came back to the UK. After meeting up with her second husband, she didn't do much art for a while until her second child began attending a progressive Steiner school, and Ursula was offered work there as a teacher on the creative side.

Her links to the rock 'n' roll glory days were far from over, however.

"I was asked if I wanted a little job, helping John Lennon and Yoko Ono's assistant. It developed from there - John and Yoko's housekeeper stormed off, and I stepped into her shoes.

"They didn't like having a lot of people around, so I did everything - I rolled the joints, and I cooked the joints for lunch. They were recording Imagine at the time as there was a recording studio in the house and filming for it as well. I think I could be seen several times on the film, but Yoko cut out a lot of the bits where I appeared.

"John was very down to earth. The first time I met him, I was so overwhelmed I could hardly speak. But he made me feel at ease straight away. What you saw was what you got with him.

"He was an absolute genius, an amazing man. There was a massive library in the house, with books from floor to ceiling, reached by big white

ladders. John and Yoko were away quite a lot, so I wasn't busy when they weren't there, and one day I found on the top shelves some of his work when he'd been editor of his school magazine. He was incredibly creative, but a regular guy who was

so easy to get on with.

"I had a different relationship with Yoko. She came from a very wealthy Japanese family where she had been treated a bit like a princess, so she was used to giving orders.

"I lived in a little cottage on their estate, and I was with them until they moved to New York. They asked me to go with them, but I decided it wasn't right for me."

Ursula's links to rock 'n' roll legends were to continue for a while longer.

"I was asked to be the personal chef to Robin Gibb of the Bee Gees, so I lived with him and his wife for several years at their magnificent historic Oxfordshire home in Thame," she says.

Although Ursula's passion for art had been put on the back burner during her years mixing with the rich and famous, it had never waned and was to become the main focus of her life once more, as it remains today. Her stunning work made a significant impact when it was exhibited at galleries in Lewes and Forest Row, and she has also exhibited extensively in London and the South-East since the mid-1990s.

"When the children were older, I met my third husband, and once the children were a certain age, I trained in art therapy and did a placement. I then ▶

the big interview

◀ worked as an art therapist, which involved painting and drawing every day, and that led to a deepening of the artistic process for me," she says.

"Now, all I want to do is paint. I have two streams - my life drawings and my landscapes, which I think of as moodscapes. In essence, my work is about feeling, feeling through my senses, and discovering what lies beyond and below the surface of what I wish to express visually.

"I endeavour to seek visual harmony, beauty and balance, and a new perception of the inner and outer world through painting, drawing, and poetry. I work with simple themes that are deeply worked through to find new images often abstract and sometimes finding familiar forms.

"I've worked with all the elements now. First was water, then fire and earth and, more recently, the air. I like to work really big with my 'inert' landscapes, or moodscapes. A friend said recently that they made you want to 'get in them and walkabout'. I want to give people something lovely to live with and that they can put themselves into,



imagine themselves in that scene.

"It can be quite a chaotic process. I never know beforehand what I am going to paint, so I use big palette knives and big brushes to start with and wait for something

to happen. I like my work to have a sense of mystery, mysticism, and the titles of each painting are very important to me as I believe they enhance the image.

"My life drawings are just as important to me, and I tend to keep them minimal. I draw very quickly, often using moving models, and I believe one beautiful line is better than ten, which don't quite make it. Some have just been bought for a big project at a hotel in Miami, where they're being used to line the walls of its Crystal Spa."

Ursula's life has undoubtedly rocked, and she has a wealth of fond memories of her days with some of the music world's most celebrated personalities. Still, she is entirely contented with the peace she finds with a paintbrush in her hand amid the beauty of the Sussex countryside. •



Ursula in her studio;
Above: 'The call of the
horizon' painting
by Ursula