

PETULA CLARK'S SOUNDS



Petula Clark, top, as Norma Desmond in Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Sunset Boulevard* and, below, on stage in 1976



From top: Petula with David Cassidy, David Frost and with her *Goodbye Mr Chips* co-star Peter O'Toole

MARTIN HUTCHINSON GOES DOWNTOWN TO CATCH UP WITH PETULA CLARK AHEAD OF HER UK TOUR

THE word "icon" is over-used these days, but there is one particular artist for whom the term really is an

understatement - Petula Clark. Now 83 years old, the singer, actress and musical theatre star is still very active having just released a new album ahead of her UK concert tour next month.

Awarded a CBE, along with many other accolades throughout her career, she says she keeps them all safe and sound.

"I have a chalet in the French Alps and I keep them all in one room, but I never look at them. The Grammys are kind of nice and cute and it's nice to have the awards but what matters to me is the 'doing'."

As regards her CBE, she says modestly: "It's a wonderful thing to have, but it would never occur to me to wear it."

She starred alongside Hollywood legend Fred Astaire in the 1968 movie *Finian's Rainbow*, a role for which she was nominated for a Golden Globe.

"I've done some 'straight' plays, and by that I mean no singing, and I loved doing that. I think if I had to choose it would be singing, but I prefer not to choose," she says. "When I do my concerts there's a certain element of acting. I act out the song in my head and you must always instil the song with something of yourself."

Petula's new album *From Now On* has just been released. She explains: "I recorded it in a small



Petula starred with Fred Astaire in *Finian's Rainbow*

studio in London. I'd recorded my last album there and enjoyed it so much that I wanted to record there again. It's at the bottom of the producer's garden and looks rather cute, like a Wendy house. It's the perfect miniature recording studio.

"The new album is called *From Now On* and it's a sort of philosophy, in that I'm living for the moment.

"I've worked with some amazing people and that's always exciting. I've also learned from some great actors like Peter O'Toole and Fred Astaire. There's always something to learn."

Born to a Welsh mother who taught her to sing, Petula was on stage before the age of 10 and had her own radio series at 11. She

was a child movie star and began a recording career in her teens.

The hits started coming in the 1950s and continued with memorable songs like *Downtown*, *Don't Sleep In The Subway*, *Sailor* and *This Is My Song*.

She moved to France in 1959 and married Claude Wolff. He remains her manager to this day and while the pair are still married Petula has previously said that they are no longer in a "romantic relationship".

She is the best-selling British female recording artist in history, with more than 68 million sales, and was the first UK female artist to win a Grammy award - for *Downtown* in 1964 - and it is not her only Grammy.

She will be showcasing the new album on her UK tour which launches in Cardiff on October 9 before heading all over the country including dates in Birmingham, Manchester, Glasgow and London.

"I think I'll be doing about six or seven from the new album, and then the obvious songs - all the hits," she points out, "as many as I can get in."

"Apart from three covers on the album, which include Paul McCartney's *Blackbird* and Peggy Lee's *Fever*, all the songs are brand new. I also did some writing on it.

"I'll hopefully get some songs in the show from *Sunset Boulevard*,

which I did on stage, and *Finian's Rainbow*. And I'll be playing a bit of piano."

What about favourites? "There is a song that I enjoy singing more and more and that's *Couldn't Live Without Your Love*. I always love it and even after all this time it keeps growing on me."

Backing Petula on stage will be a band of five musicians. "I've worked with orchestras, but nowadays a five-piece band of really great musicians will get all the big sound needed," she says.

Petula also writes songs under her own name and, sometimes, under the pseudonym Al Grant.

"It wasn't my idea to use the name Al Grant, I think it was to do with publishing. My husband came up with the name - he's French and he thought the name sounded American," she smiles.

Looking back on a long and varied career makes it difficult for Petula to pick out highlights.

"Oh, there are just too many to mention, and who knows? There may be another one coming up, you never can tell."

The bubbly star, who seems so much younger than her years, adds: "I am actually still learning how to do it. When I go on stage I don't know what's going to happen and that's exciting. I like the element of surprise."

■ Go to petulafromnowon.com for album and tour details.