



Russian doll: Ever youthful Valeriya, 40, hopes to have the same success here as in her native country where she has sold a staggering 100 million records

FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE VALERIYA EXPORTS HER OWN BRAND OF BEST-SELLING POP TO THE UK

She has sold more than 100 million records in her home country and is mobbed whenever she leaves the house. Now elfin pop singer Valeriya, 40, dubbed the Russian Madonna, has set her sights on the UK.

A huge star back home, Valeriya is rarely out of the press and suffered a well-documented break-up with her husband after an abusive relationship. Now happily married to new husband Iosif Prigozhin (known as the Russian Simon Cowell), she lives just outside Moscow with her three children, Anna, 14, Artemy, 13 and Arseny, nine.

As she releases her latest album, *Out of Control*, in the UK, we caught up with Valeriya to talk about mad fans, how she survived a stabbing and her struggle to balance the demands of being a celebrity and a mum.

You're unknown in the UK but have sold massively back home in Russia. Is it refreshing to come over here and not be recognised?

"It is a previously unknown feeling for me, but I hope my team and I will break the ice in this country and acquire new fans and friends very soon."

Do you have any that have gone too far? Stalkers, or people who have invaded your personal life?

"My real fans are great, although from time to time a bad

apple might appear on the horizon in an attempt to spoil this wonderful relationship. Recently, one lady in Moscow was trying to send some menacing messages to me and my family. The only way to overcome it is to immediately go public – this is what normally scares these people off."

You've been likened to Madonna in terms of your success. If you met her, would you feel star-struck?

"Madonna is a powerful artiste with bags of experience. I have not met her before but I am sure we can become friends. On stage we are completely different – she is more athletic and I am more vocal. I never attribute stardom either to myself or to other people – I judge everything by achievements."

What Western singers or bands inspire you? Have you ever met any of them?

"I like Sting, Sade and world-famous bands of the 1970s and 1980s, like the Bee Gees. I met Robin Gibb about half a year ago and we've become very good friends with him and his lovely wife Dwina. With Robin we've recorded a cover of *Stayin' Alive* and we're working together on new projects."

Are you a diva? What kind of demands do you make before a performance?

"No, absolutely not. I don't have any special or extravagant requirements. Several bottles of still water, fruit and tea – that's all I ask for. Frankly, I care much more about the technical side

being in complete order. I always sing live – that's why this point is of vital importance for me."

Before you became famous, what was your life like? Did you ever work in an ordinary job?

"No, I've never had an ordinary job as you call it, I've always been working as a singer. As far back as I can remember I always wanted to sing. I grew up in a family of classical musicians and my mother says that I began to sing even before I began to talk."

You were in an abusive relationship with your former husband and manager. Can you tell us about that and how you came through it?

"Yes, my husband was a real monster. He drank a lot, and later I found out that he was a drug addict too. He beat me and, what's even more terrifying, he beat the children. There were times when he stuck a knife in my leg and even tried to shoot me. I am very religious – that's why I tried my best to save our marriage. I thought I could help him but, one day, after ten years

of marriage, I couldn't stand it any more. I took my children and, without any money, I went back to my parents' house in Atkarsk – a small town in the middle of Russia. Who knows, maybe I'd still be there if my

present husband Iosif had not persuaded me to come back on stage."

How do you combine being a full-time mother and a superstar singer?

"It's almost impossible but I think I succeed in managing that. I am always in the know about everything my kids are busy with and keep in constant contact. It's very difficult but very rewarding because I am close to them and vice versa. Love makes a family strong."

If you could change one thing about your appearance, what would it be?

"I am completely satisfied with the way I look. I've got a slim body and a pretty face – very modest of me, isn't it! What more can I desire? I asked my husband if he'd like to change anything in my appearance and he said he likes me just the way I am. I was pleased to hear it."

When you're not working, what do you like to do most?

"I adore spending my day with the family – to have a long breakfast together, go for a walk, do some shopping, watch a movie, and read a book before going to bed."

Many people in the UK still assume anyone wealthy and from Russia must have some dealings with the Russian mafia. Have you ever?

"Do I look like a female version of Frank Sinatra? Please..."



INTERVIEW: JOE MOTT

Out of Control is released on 28 July

ALBUM REVIEW By Joe Mott



Melody, Sharleen Spiteri (Mercury)

Yes, it's the Scottish one from Texas gone solo – and it's a very pleasant album if you liked Texas and are quite fond of Duffy.

Motown fans would also do well to pick up this album, with opener *It Was You* sounding like *Mercy* with just a tad more Detroit than Duffy could muster.

The Motown sound continues on *Stop, I Don't Love You Anymore*, while *Melody* is a hip-hop meets James Bond theme tune effort that really works. *You Let Me Down* is a gorgeous ballad of sultry strings and melancholy vocals reminiscent of soul classics.

The most immediate track is first single *All the Times I Cried* which, thanks to the brass, sounds like it could have been produced by Mark Ronson.

Star rating: ★★★



Modern Guilt, Beck (XL)

At long last we can welcome back Beck. Teaming up with hip-hop star Danger Mouse, he has gone back to experimentation with

jumping beats and strange noises. That's what made his second album, *Odelay*, so good. So expect more of Beck's spooky vocals sitting over epic backing tracks.

Chemtrails is beat- and organ-based with almost jazz-inspired off-key riffs pinned together with solid piano hits. The title track just builds and builds over a chugging beat and is perfect Beck.

But perhaps the best song is the least obvious – *Walls*, featuring singer Cat Power, with its almost folksy melody.

As with all Beck's work, you'll need to listen to *Modern Guilt* for ages to really understand it. But it's well worth the effort.

Star rating: ★★★★★