

Wuthering Heights

BY KATE BUSH

How the 20-year-old "Cathy", inspired by Emily Brontë, recorded her epic debut single, and fought EMI to score a monumental No 1: "The unusualness was key, this strange girl..."

KEY PLAYERS


Andrew Powell
Producer, arranger, bass


David Paton
12-string guitar


Ian Bairnson
Guitar


Brian Bath
Guitarist in KT Bush Band


Brian Wiseman
Video maker


Gered Mankowitz
Photographer

NICK HARVEY/WIREIMAGE

PRIOR TO HER triumphant London shows earlier this year, the last song Kate Bush performed at one of her own concerts, on May 14, 1979, was the extraordinary single that launched an extraordinary career.

Her only No 1, "Wuthering Heights" was inspired by a BBC mini-series of Emily Brontë's Gothic novel. Haunted by the image of Catherine Earnshaw's ghostly hand outside the window – "Let me in! Let me in!" – Bush wrote the song aged 18, shortly before beginning work on debut album *The Kick Inside*. "I was in my flat, sitting at the upright piano at about midnight," she told her fan club in 1979. "There was a full moon, the curtains were open, and it came quite easily."

The fact that Bush shared her childhood name (Cathy) with Earnshaw, and a birthday (July 30) with Brontë, fostered a sense of cosmic kinship with the subject of "Wuthering Heights", a bond acted out when she recorded the song with members of the Alan Parsons Project. "She seemed to adopt different personas when she was singing," recalls guitarist Ian Bairnson. "Suddenly there was another person there."

Aided by a wildly eccentric video and some revealing publicity photos, "Wuthering Heights" was instantly impactful, and later spoofed by everyone from Pamela Stephenson to Alan Partridge. These days, Bush may regard its unbridled romanticism with mixed feelings (it was nowhere to be heard in the Before The Dawn shows), but it remains one of music's boldest opening statements of artistic intent, and an unforgettable exploration of obsessive love, supernatural imagining and powerful femininity. *GRAEME THOMSON*

ANDREW POWELL: In 1975, I got a call from David Gilmour, saying he'd got this artist and he just thought she was something really special. This was substantially prior to Kate signing to EMI. Initially he said he was going to produce her, but in the end Dave put up money for some sessions. These were really superior demos, and I ended up producing them, including "The Man With The Child In His Eyes". A couple of years later I went in to do the album. She had so many songs. I've still got some of the cassettes. I must have 100 songs here, still, written pre-*The Kick Inside*.

BRIAN BATH: She wrote "Wuthering Heights" at her flat at Wickham Road in Brockley when she was living with [*KT Bush Band bassist*] Del Palmer there. At the time [*their relationship*] was all a bit hush-hush, a bit keep it careful.

POWELL: My memory is that "Wuthering Heights" was written very close to us going into the studio. I think it was only a few days before. Kate came around to where I was living and said, "What about this one?" She sat down at my piano and out it came. It was obvious to me immediately that it was something extraordinary.

DAVID PATON: Andrew gave us a brief outline as to what Kate was all about, Dave Gilmour nurturing her and all that. He said, "She's very young but EMI are really excited about her, she's really special." I remember him saying the music was a bit wild, a bit wacky even. We arrived at the studio, Kate introduced herself, and Andrew said, "Sit down and play them the song," and that's how it was done. She sat down at the piano, said, "It goes like this," and just played. We were all gathered around the piano with our jaws dropped, because it was a stunning performance. Faultless, absolutely faultless, and she could do that time and time again. It sounded fantastic, there was just a great vibe in the studio.

IAN BAIRNSON: She sat and played the piano and sang the guide vocal. We wrapped ourselves around her, looking for ways to embellish it or give it direction. For us it was a very refreshing thing, because it was wide open.

PATON: Talking about Cathy and Heathcliff was so clever. I didn't like to ask her, "What's this song really



"She was experimenting more and more in all kinds of directions..." Kate Bush in 1978

about?" That book must have had a huge impact on her to influence her in that way, but she kept her vision to herself. A lot of artists you work with, you usually find that they're besotted with themselves – like Freddie Mercury, all he could do was talk about himself all the time. She wasn't like that at all. She didn't say, "'I want to do this and that, me, me, me, me." She wasn't that kind of person at all and that in itself was very refreshing.

BAIRNSON: I didn't pay a lot of notice to the lyrics. It was only about a year ago when I read the lyrics and appreciated them so much more.

JON KELLY *(Engineer)*: The depth of her lyrics and the originality of her melodies were just so different from anything else that was around.

PATON: Her influences were pretty unique, pretty stylised. And that high-pitched voice. It wasn't until I was listening to "Wuthering Heights" on the radio that I really realised, Woah, that's really high-pitched! When she sat and sang live for us I didn't really notice anything unusual about it, I just felt her style was very unique.

> "I said to Kate, 'You're going to be so famous you're not going to be able to walk down the street'"
>
> JON KELLY, ENGINEER

POWELL: I loved it, I was very much in favour of it. She was doing some very interesting things with her voice. She was experimenting more and more in all sorts of directions – vocally, lyrically and musically.

BAIRNSON: Whether she was putting on an unusual voice – or voices – on "Wuthering Heights", or whatever, it still came across as genuine and we accepted it. That is what made her stand apart. The fact that her talent had so many facets to it and each one was so believable.

POWELL: Did she twirl around all the time? No. I know singers who do, but she'd just stand there and sing and concentrate on what she was doing. She wasn't one for doing the dance of the seven veils while she was doing her vocals.

BAIRNSON: I never saw her pick up the guitar, but she loved it. On "Wuthering Heights" I built a solo and endeavoured to make it part of the song.

PATON: I didn't play bass on the song. That was at Andrew's insistence! He was a bass player in his youth and he plays OK – he's a bit busy – and as a consolation prize he said, "Davie, you can play 12-string." Hmmm. I must say he's a very accomplished musician all round.

POWELL: I played bass. Partly because I had a good idea for a part, and also because Ian had sprained his wrist or something. Normally I'd have had Ian play acoustic and David play bass, but Ian couldn't play barre chords – and "Wuthering

GERED MANKOWITZ



"She certainly wasn't uncomfortable with it..." Kate Bush shot by Gered Mankowitz, 1978

GERED MANKOWITZ

Heights", being in F#m, it's all barre chords – so David ended up playing guitar. Rather than having to double-track his own performance, I just had an idea and thought, Hang on a minute, can I have your bass? Actually, I think I used my own in the end because I re-did it.

KELLY: Andrew was a superb musician and arranger. All the parts were written out and he'd hand them to the rhythm section, they had chord charts and a brief outline of what he wanted. He'd worked with Kate on the arrangement beforehand and how he wanted it to turn out. It was an absolutely brilliant job, a first-class record.

POWELL: EMI wanted "James And The Cold Gun" to be the first single. It was the most obvious song on the record, and it would have been one of the worst choices. I mean, it was a fun thing to have on there, and it was one of the few songs of hers she'd already played live with the KT Bush Band, but she stuck to her guns on "Wuthering Heights" and she was absolutely right.

KELLY: It was on Kate's insistence that "Wuthering Heights" should be the first single, and good for her. Quite right. It was fabulous.

BAIRNSON: I remember thinking, 'This is really good, but I wonder how people will react?' It was going to be all or nothing. You can never pre-judge the great British record buying public.

BATH: I remember going around to her flat when "Wuthering Heights" was first played on Capitol Radio. Kate said, "Oh, they're playing my song tonight." We were all sitting round there and the DJ said he'd found this really odd song, or something like that, and played it. We couldn't believe it was coming out of the radio. And then he kept playing it. You could phone Capitol to vote for the song you wanted to hear that day. I was round at her parents' farm pretty much every day, there was always something to do, and Kate's mum would say, "Have you phoned Capitol radio yet? Use the phone! Do it now!" It kept getting played and all of a sudden it just exploded.

GERED MANKOWITZ: I took the infamous 'leotard' photo in my Great Windmill Street studio in Soho in early 1978. I was doing a lot of work for EMI, and they called me and said, "We've got this extraordinary young woman called Kate Bush, she sounds like nobody else, she's wonderful to look at, but we don't know what to do with her. We need some photographs, we need an image." I always found the clothes that dancers used during rehearsals a very attractive look, and I thought it was a natural fit for Kate because she was so into dance and movement. I suggested we got leotards and woollen working socks and all that gear, and she seemed to like the idea. When the pictures were processed, the advertising agency EMI had employed to promote "Wuthering Heights" came up with the campaign of putting the posters on buses, and selected the one in the pink leotard – famously showing her nipples – and the rest is history. She certainly wasn't uncomfortable with it. She was perfectly aware of how she looked, because she had spent two hours in the dressing room during the shoot. It was her choice, done with her full participation and knowledge. She was very comfortable with her body. The pictures were a huge commercial success and I think they had a great deal to do with putting Kate on the map.

KELLY: I can remember saying, "You're going to be so famous you're not going to be able to walk down the street." I said that to her after the first week of recording, though she wouldn't have believed it.

POWELL: The unusualness was key, this strange girl. As soon as she did "Wuthering Heights" on *Top Of The Tops*, that made a difference, too, because it wasn't a conventional performance.

BAIRNSON: It was quite a shock when I saw her first on *Top Of The Pops*, because the Kate we knew in the studio and the one that turned up on TV was a completely different persona.

BATH: She was just a bag of nerves her first time on *Top Of The Pops*. Unfortunately it's not a great performance. It wasn't ideal. The KT Bush Band all went along expecting to play, and at the BBC they said, "Oh no, we use our own musicians." We were all upset not to be included, and so was she. All we could do was stand in front of her and say, "Come on Kate, go for it." But she was very nervous. I think if we had been onstage it would have been better, but it didn't matter. The song was already massive by then. I think the video helped.

BRIAN WISEMAN: She had done an outdoor video for "Wuthering Heights" but EMI asked Keith MacMillan to shoot another, which I worked on. We did it really quickly, through the middle of the night at Ewart studios in Wandsworth. We got halfway through it, decided we didn't like what we were doing, and started over. We got an idea from some Canadian movie Keith had seen, shot it on video and went down a load of generations to get that ghostly, mirrored effect. It was quite striking. She didn't have any real creative input on that at all, as I recall, but she was very nice, very quirky.

POWELL: When I saw the first video I thought, 'Oh, OK, this is going to be an interesting development!' By that point it was clear that there was a whole lot of layers to what she was doing. From that point on, there was no stopping her.

FACT FILE

- **Written by:** Kate Bush
- **Performers:** Kate Bush (piano, vocals), Andrew Powell (bass), David Paton (guitar), Ian Bairnson (lead guitar), Stuart Elliott (drums), Duncan MacKay (keyboards)
- **Producer:** Andrew Powell
- **Engineer:** Jon Kelly
- **Recorded at:** AIR, London
- **Released:** January 20, 1978
- **UK/US charts:** 1/na



WOW! Kate Bush by Gered Mankowitz *is an ultra-large-format, signed, limited-edition book of photographs from Gered Mankowitz's 1978/79 sessions with Kate Bush. WOW! is published by Ormond Yard Press and is available from www.snapgalleries.com*

TIMELINE

Summer 1976 Catherine Bush signs to EMI

March – June 1977 Gigs in London pubs with the KT Bush Band

Summer 1977 Writes "Wuthering Heights" at 44 Wickham Road, South London. She records it during sessions for *The Kick Inside*, at AIR

20 January, 1978 "Wuthering Heights" is released

18 February, 1978 With the song at No 27, Bush performs on *Top Of The Pops*. She later describes the experience as "like watching myself die"

March 11, 1978 Bush becomes the first woman to have a UK No 1 with a self-written song. "Wuthering Heights" remains at the top for four weeks