

Culture



He was so vain: Carly Simon with Warren Beatty in 1984, left

Smitten by Jagger, seduced by Beatty

It's eight o'clock on a wintry Manhattan morning outside ABC Television Studios. A crowd of middle-aged women has gathered on the pavement, waiting for filming to start on the daytime magazine show *The View*.

Wrapped up in thick winter coats and boots, some are from upstate New York or New Jersey, others have flown in from as far afield as Indiana and Kansas, and have been here since dawn.

All are in town to see the three-time Grammy winner Carly Simon, who has been invited on to the show to discuss her new memoir, *Boys in the Trees*.

The book, which was published in Britain on Friday but came out in America two weeks ago, is one of the most compelling celebrity autobiographies of the year. An unflinching examination of her career and star-packed love life, it is crammed full of anecdotes about her relationships with some of the Seventies' biggest names, including Mick Jagger ("I was smitten"), Jack Nicholson ("outrageous"), Warren Beatty ("a glorious specimen of man") and Cat Stevens (also "glorious" but "cerebral" as well).

It also chronicles her rise to fame and her tempestuous marriage to the singer James Taylor, the father of her two children, who was serially unfaithful and addicted to heroin.

After introducing myself at reception I'm ushered into Simon's dressing room. The singer is draped across a velvet sofa. Tall and thin, wearing dark glasses, she still emanates a rock-chick persona and, at 70, retains her striking good looks. But it becomes apparent that, despite

half-a-century as a professional musician, she is nervous.

She is singing with her 38-year-old son Ben, who has followed his parents into the music business, on the show and is worried about her performance.

"I'm starting to lose my voice," she says, as I sit down next to her on the sofa. "I can't make those high notes anymore." She hums a tune.

"You sound great to me," I say, trying to reassure her.

She puts a hand on my shoulder. "Thank you," she beams, visibly relaxing.

Despite her huge success – her most famous single, *You're So Vain*, has been ranked by Billboard as one of the 100 greatest songs of all time – it is clear from her memoir that Simon is a sensitive soul. She suffers from depression, and has been going to therapists for most of her adult life. There is a vulnerability about her.

Writing the book was "healing", she says – "a great release".

"I realised the story was more about boys than girls, it's about



'These men had amazing charisma. I couldn't take my eyes off them'

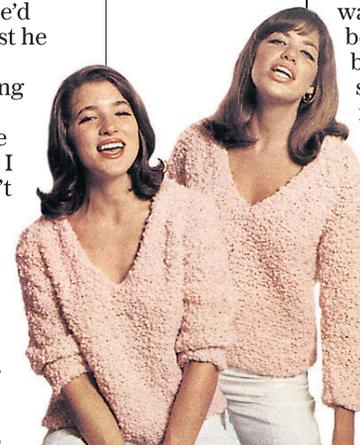
patterns that develop from our relationships with our fathers."

Her own low self esteem, she believes, stems from her privileged but troubled upbringing in New York and Connecticut, with her three siblings; her father Richard, the co-founder of the giant publishing house Simon & Schuster; and her mother Andrea. Richard was "remote" and "brittle", and harboured dreams of becoming a concert pianist.

"I've always thought if he'd pursued a career as a pianist he would have been happier," she says. "The effect of being without a father's love was huge. Also, I didn't look the way he wanted me to look. I looked Jewish and he didn't want to be Jewish." She says her father, "like a lot of Jews in post Second World War New York who wanted to assimilate, was kind of anti-Semitic".

Her mother, meanwhile, conducted an affair with a much younger man: a 19-year-old called Ronny who

Lip service: with Mick Jagger, above; and, below, with sister Lucy (left). Simon with her children and mother in 1981, left



was employed by her as a male nanny.

So self-absorbed were her parents, they didn't notice when their daughter, aged just seven, embarked on an abusive relationship with a 16-year-old boy, which was to continue for six years.

Looking back, Simon talks about the "extreme loss of innocence. I developed the sense that it was OK, that was the awful thing. I was stimulated by it but didn't know why."

Aged 10, she told her sisters, who "didn't believe me. A year later they told my mother." Andrea Simon banned the boy from the family home for a year, but took no further action.

Her solace in these years was music. Attending speech therapy sessions for a stutter she had developed, she was encouraged, *King's Speech* style, to sing and uncovered a natural talent. She formed a duo with her sister Lucy, the Simon Sisters, and they eventually had a hit with the 1964 folk album *Wynken, Blynken and Nod*. Still in her teens, Simon was also attending university, but dropped out to launch a solo career.

Carly Simon, her debut album, was a well-reviewed hit, and before she knew it she was being compared to singers such as Joni Mitchell and found herself mixing with film and music legends.

Simon found the blend of talent and charisma in the men she met extremely attractive and, in addition to Jagger, Nicholson, Beatty and Cat Stevens, had an affair with Kris Kristofferson.

Simon's funniest story in her memoir relates to a visit to her shrink, "Dr L", the day after a romantic night with Beatty. Breaking