

RUNWAY Exclusive

It's an image burned into the world's collective conscious: a lone man, dressed in grey sweatshirt and pants, running through Philadelphia and up the steps of the art museum. He's no thief in the night – he's "Rocky Balboa." And the song he celebrates to at the top of the stairs, *Gonna Fly Now*, also known as the *Theme to Rocky*, is one of the most recognized songs in the world.

So well known and beloved, in fact, that it's been used in many places since *Rocky* appeared in 1976, including scenes in television and films like *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air* and *You Don't Mess With the Zohan*, at Philadelphia Eagles sporting events, and even as a U.S. presidential campaign song.

Gonna Fly Now was also nominated for an Academy Award in 1977 – just one of the many distinctions that belong to singer and songwriter Carol Connors, who co-wrote the song with Bill Conti and Ayn Robbins.

You may know Connors from her early career; in 1956, she was the lead singer in a little group known as The Teddy Bears, which also included Phil Spector. Spector wrote their best-known song, *To Know Him is to Love Him*, specifically to show off Connors' voice, and in 1958 the song reached #1 on the *Billboard Hot 100*. It was such a powerful song that it attracted the attention of Elvis Presley, who, not long after hearing it, sent for Connors and began a serious relationship with her. "When we met," says Connors, "we sang harmony together. And Elvis became my first boyfriend."



Photo by Timothy Fielding

CAROL CONNORS

Still a "Knock Out" After All These Years



Photo by Celebrity Photo

In the 1960s, Connors was known for being the only woman to create hotrod songs including *Hey Little Cobra* for the Rip Chords, *Yum Yum Yamaha* and *Go Go G.T.O.* She's contributed to such diverse projects as *Looking for Mr. Goodbar*, *The Rescuers* – which earned her a second Oscar nomination – and *The Pianist*, and co-wrote themes to television's *Lifestyles with Robin Leach* and *Shari Belafonti* and *Star Search*. In 2000, John F. Kennedy University (San Francisco, Calif.) awarded her an honorary doctorate in fine arts.

Today, Connors is a two-time Oscar nominated, Emmy, Golden Globes and Grammy Award winning songwriter with dozens of credits to her name. Her charitable contributions are significant, including being honored by Reef Check, along with close friend Barbi Benton and Jean-Michel Cousteau, for helping to save the world's reefs. *Runway* was honored to host Connors' birthday party last November at Madame Chocolat in Los Angeles.



Photo by Celebrity Photo

Connors Quotes:

On live television:

When Connors was just 16 years old, she performed with the Teddy Bears on the Perry Como Show (a video of which is available on YouTube.com). One of the highlights, says Connors, was that “my voice *didn't* crack!” Apparently it had during rehearsals when she hit the highest note of the song. “Phil Spector was furious about it. He threatened me within an inch of my life if my voice cracked again, and let me tell you, I hit that note *perfectly!* After all, it was live TV,” she laughs.

On Frank Sinatra:

In one of Sinatra's last interviews given in 1992, he was asked, “Who, in your opinion, are the best, most promising songwriters in the business today?” His response: “There are several contemporary composers whose talent I regard highly and they'll get even better as they progress. I've been using, with much personal satisfaction and fine audience reaction, some of the best material of songwriters such as George Harrison, Jim Webb, David Gates, **Carol Connors**, Carol Bayer Sager, John Denver and Alan and Marilyn Bergman.”

Says Connors, “My song *Only the Music, Only My Song* is all about my musical life and is dedicated to Frank Sinatra, who really did love songwriters.”

On love songs and love:

“I co-wrote the song *With You I'm Born Again*, with Robert Culp about our own love affair, and it went on to become one of the greatest love songs ever written,” says Connors, noting that it has been re-recorded by many contemporary artists. “One line that I had wanted to throw out was, ‘comfort me through all this madness. I just felt like it didn't fit, it didn't rhyme. At the time, Robert begged me not to cut it, and I didn't. Especially with everything going on in the world today, it's proven to be a prescient and powerful line.”

On lifestyles:

“When the show was first getting started, I asked [show host] Robin [Leach] if he had a song called *Champagne Wishes and Caviar Dreams* for the show. He said ‘no’ and I said, ‘why not?’ He replied, ‘because no one's written it yet. You should do it.’ So I wrote it. Dionne Warwick was just coming off of her song, *That's What Friends Are For*, and she was really hot at the time. She came in and recorded it for us.”

On finding success:

“If you don't eat it, sleep it, think it, drink it, need it – *forget it!* You have to be *that* dedicated. You *must* believe in yourself. There are so many times people will tell you to just get married, have some kids, go for the white picket fence. You've got to always hone your craft and pursue what's in your heart.”



On muscle cars:

“I'm the only woman to ever write a hit hotrod song. After I wrote *Hey Little Cobra*, Brian Wilson [of the Beach Boys] said to me, ‘I knew it was written by a girl!’ And I said, ‘How?’ And he said, ‘Because you can't take your Cobra out of gear and let it coast to the line!’”

