

THE LAURA THE JUNGLE

THE DISCO smash 'Gloria' — currently steaming up the charts — marks Laura Branigan's second big invasion of the British mainland. But the first time wasn't quite so successful — she got turned back as soon as she landed.

"A friend and I stowed aboard the SS France," explains the New York based singer. "We were seeing someone off on their way to school in Oxford and I guess we had too much champagne at the bon voyage party onboard. So we stayed on and slipped into a cabin until the ship sailed. A steward found us and we were locked up for a couple of days.

"And as soon as we got to England we were given emergency passports and flown home. Our parents had to pay the lot. I don't think they were too pleased."

Since that little disaster eight years ago, Laura has been concentrating on her musical and dramatic career. She attended New York's famous Academy of Dramatic Arts, played in musicals and even got a spot touring with the bedsit suicide's favourite singer Leonard Cohen. But the big break came when she sang a number for the head of Atlantic Records and was immediately signed.

"I remember the cab ride home that night," she recalls. "I was on Cloud Nine."

A thunderous voice backed by the click-along beat, 'Gloria' is the perfect song for Laura. It was a massive club hit on both sides of the Atlantic — I first heard it in a transvestite bar in New York but that's another story. Where did the song come from in the first place?

"It was originally an Italian song," she explains, "recorded by Umberto Tozzi and sold 30 million copies in Europe and my producer bought it to me. I liked it but I thought it was too European. So the lyrics were re-written and that was it.

"A song must have emotion. I must get that across. People have to feel happy, sad or want to dance and I have to feel it in order to sing it.

"My favourite song from England at the moment is Musical Youth's 'Pass The Dutchie'."

The idea of crossover is something dear to her heart — most people only know her for 'Gloria' but as her album 'Branigan' shows, she sings with a real mixture of musical forms. "I want to get across that I'm a real singer with a four octave range. I don't feel I could get stuck in a particular style."



by SIMON TEBBUTT