

## Biography

DEACON BLUE – *A New House* (Warner Artist Services/Rhino)

When Deacon Blue picked up the threads of their recording career with *The Hipsters* in 2012, they had little idea of the impact which that album would have. The group's dedicated fans were, naturally, quick to embrace it and the album sailed into the Top 20 on its week of release. But then the media tastemakers got on board, in particular Radio 2, in particular Radio 2, which A-listed "The Hipsters", "The Outsiders", "Turn" and "That's What We Can Do". As the band toured and the word spread, a new generation discovered the music of Deacon Blue. When the group played T in the Park in the summer of 2013, they were the talk of the festival. The buzz continued to build in September when they played a triumphant show at the Royal Albert Hall in London, and turned into a roar of acclaim as they ended their second tour of the year with a homecoming Christmas gig at the brand-new, 13,000-capacity SSE Hydro Arena in Glasgow.

"The Hydro was, honestly, one of the best gigs of our life," says singer Lorraine McIntosh. "If you can do that, and you've been at it for 26 years, then I think you're doing something right."

Ricky Ross the singer and key songwriter in the band thought so too. Galvanised by the success of *The Hipsters*, he was already deep into the process of writing songs for the next album. "I knew what the band could do. I knew what Paul Savage [producer of *The Hipsters*] could do. I knew there was another good record on the way," he says.

By the spring of 2014 Ross, with the help of guitarist Gregor Philp, had finished writing and demoing a new batch of songs. The band went back in to Savage's Chem19 Studio in Blantyre on the outskirts of Glasgow, where they set up and played together live, as they had done for *The Hipsters*.

"It's not the cheapest way to do it," says drummer Dougie Vipond. "But we've honed our skills playing together over the years, and the band is playing so well live at the moment that you want to catch an element of that on the record."

"Paul Savage is one of the best producers we've worked with," says keyboard player James Prime. "And Ricky and Gregor's demos were so good. There really wasn't an awful lot that needed to be done. It was so fast getting everything turned around."

The result is *A New House*, an album full of confidence, courage and rekindled passion for the second life which Deacon Blue has now embarked upon. Filled with a sense of joy and forward-looking energy, it is an album which sounds distinctly at odds with the group's veteran status.

It is now 27 years since Deacon Blue released their debut album, *Raintown*. A string of best-sellers followed: *When the World Knows Your Name* [1989], *Fellow Hoodlums* [1991], *Whatever You Say, Say Nothing* [1993] and a double-platinum compilation *Our Town – The Greatest Hits* [1994] which included “Real Gone Kid”, “Fergus Sings the Blues”, “Dignity”, “Wages Day”, “Twist and Shout” and many others.

Then, with 12 UK Top 40 singles and two No.1 albums to their credit, the group split up for five years. While Ross built up his career as a songwriter and solo act, he and the other band members set about establishing themselves with remarkable success in various fields of the media, the arts and academia. But as their other lives unfolded, they never gave up on the Deacon Blue dream. A reunion show led on to a new album *Walking Back Home* [1999] and a follow-up *Homesick* [2001] after which the band continued to reconvene whenever there was a good reason to do so, of which there have always been many.

Now, the success of *The Hipsters* has changed the game again. “It’s like the old days,” says Vipond, “When *Raintown* came out and then two years later the next one...”

*A New House* suggests renewed pride in the band and a reawakened sense of ambition. Far from harking back to past glories, it is a collection of depth and passion which more readily bears comparison with albums by modern greats such as Elbow and Coldplay.

According to Ross, touring *The Hipsters* was inspirational in more ways than one. “Gregor and I travelled through a lot of obscure parts of England, Wales and especially Scotland on my solo tour last year,” he says. “We were right the way up in Stornoway and Ullapool in Cromartyshire, and suddenly it was spring, and it was just wonderful to see this wild countryside, and feel the energy of nature.”

Several songs reflect this theme, notably “For John Muir” which celebrates the life and work of the Scottish-born conservationist who was a key figure in establishing the National Parks in America and could be called the father of environmentalism. Numbers ranging from “The Living”, built around a beautiful chiming guitar riff, to the majestic orchestral sweep of “An Ocean” and the strangely syncopated “Wild”, all conjure a sense of wonder in the face of nature’s enduring power and beauty. “*This miracle of spring is all that matters now/Hard light, warm earth buried deep below/There’s a scent and a sense that winter’s over/One last hard fight won before we go,*” Ross sings in “March”, a song he co-wrote with Prime and Philp.

The melodic and rhythmic energy of *A New House* comes together on the title track, one of many thoughtful lyrics with a killer chorus. “I remember driving out when we were kids to see a new house being built in the suburbs,” Ross says. “It was as if they

were trying to contain the countryside, building roads and houses on it. But you can never quite contain it.”

Perhaps the biggest song on the album is “Our New Land”, a stirring anthem plainly inspired by the possibilities offered by the Scottish Independence Referendum of September 2014. Even at the height of their success Deacon Blue have always stayed and worked in Scotland, and while they have never made any formal declaration as a band, the individuals are known to favour the notion of their country being in charge of its own affairs.

“I try not to write in a campaigning way, because it limits the song,” Ross says. “But it’s on everyone’s mind. It’s a momentous decision. Everybody’s thinking ‘Where do we go?’.”

“It’s a song about the possibilities of change,” McIntosh says. “Whatever happens in the referendum, I don’t think all this awakening that is happening in Scotland at the moment can just go away. The song is about the hope of a better, new land.”

#### DB/CV

Ricky Ross [vocals/piano]: has released five albums as a solo act. He has also written songs for or with artists including James Blunt, Ronan Keating, Jamie Cullum and Nanci Griffith among many others. He presents his own radio shows, *Another Country with Ricky Ross* and *Sunday Mornings with Ricky Ross* on BBC Radio Scotland, and presented a BBC Two TV show tracing the history of his hometown Dundee. He is one half of the duo McIntosh Ross who toured and released their much-admired album *The Great Lakes* in 2009.

Lorraine McIntosh [vocals]: has forged a distinguished career as an actor on stage in productions with Tron Theatre Company in *Beowulf*, the National Theatre of Scotland in *Beautiful Burnout* and *Men Should Weep*, on television in the BBC Scotland soap *River City* and in several feature films. As a singer and songwriter, she is the other half of McIntosh Ross.

James Prime [keyboards]: is a lecturer at the University of the West of Scotland, where he and Allan Dumbreck [of the Big Dish] set up the School of Music and Recording Technology 13 years ago. There are currently 250 or so students enrolled in their Commercial Music BA degree course. “We’re arming them with everything: business, technology and performance skills,” James says. “The London music business comes here to hand-pick our students.” James also performs in several other bands, notably the Floorstompers.

Dougie Vipond [drums/vocals]: is a TV presenter for BBC Scotland and BBC Three. As well as presenting the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games, he has fronted sport, travel and rural affairs programmes including *Sportscene*, *Landward* and *The*

*Great Climb*, which won a Scottish BAFTA. In 2012, he took part in an event for Sport Relief in which he sailed, ran, rowed and cycled round Britain. He regards touring with Deacon Blue as “quite relaxing. I’ve just got to sit on a bus.” He continues to remind the others that, at 47, he is still the baby of the group.

Gregor Philp [guitars/vocals]: has played live with Deacon Blue since their 2008 tour with Simple Minds. He helped Ricky to record the early demos for *The Hipsters* and *A New House* and co-wrote songs on both albums.

Lewis Gordon [bass]: covered a session for Deacon Blue in 2008 and has been on stage and in the studio with them ever since. A young musician who has worked with John Fratelli, he is also a songwriter who used to phone Ricky to ask his advice about the music business.

## **REAL GONE KIDS**

Ewen Vernal [bass]: played in Deacon Blue until 1994 and now plays with Capercaillie.

Graeme Kelling [guitar]: was a member of Deacon Blue until his death in 2004 from pancreatic cancer. The band recently marked the tenth anniversary of his death and there was a dedication to him on the album cover of *The Hipsters*. “Truly a day doesn’t pass without us thinking about him and very often talking about him and the stories that all come up,” says Ricky, who recalled their last moments together in his song “In the End” on his album *Pale Rider*.

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