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Making Tracks: Deacon Blue make the top after a year of hard work and all play
by John Williamson

This has been the year Deacon Blue's rigorous touring and work schedule has finally paid dividends. After spending most of 1987 playing small venues up and down Britain trying to win themselves an audience, they finally had singles success in January. These were with the re-recorded Dignity and later with the re-released When Will You (Make My Telephone Ring). More importantly, the airplay and attention given to the singles has greatly boosted the sales of their Raintown album. This has now reached gold status (100,000 sales) and, in its repackaged double format, made the top twenty for the first time. With the release of the last single from Raintown, Chocolate Girl, and the ongoing work on their new album, now seemed like a good time to allow Ricky Ross, Lorraine McIntosh and Dougie Vipond to reflect and look forward.

Ricky explained the current state of play with regard to the new record: "We've done what probably amounts to two thirds to three quarters of it," he said. "We did the first two tracks in April and May with Warne Livesey in Glasgow and London. We finished those two and then we went in June to work with David Kahne. We did five tracks in six weeks there, and recently we've finished upgrading a couple of tracks that started out as very good demos."

"So we've got about nine or ten songs, and we're going to go in and do three or four more and then take the choice from the album for everything," added Dougie.

Back to Ricky, "I don't want people to get the idea that we've been in the studio from April to August – we've been in for a total of seven weeks at most. But because of the gap between finishing with one producer and rehearsing with another, and doing shows and TV things, it has spread out over a few months."

With this album having been written over a shorter period of time and in different environments, these are likely to be reflected on the final product. Several of the songs being considered for the album, like Circus Lights, The World Was Lit By Lightning and Real Gone Kid (the probable first single) have all been tried live. Lorraine explained, "Ricky has never taken time off to write, so our songs have all been written while we've been working. And we haven't played that much this year. We did a very short tour earlier in the year, but since we started recording the album we've just done a couple of benefit gigs. So we've been lucky in that way. A lot of the songs which are on the album, were tried out when we toured last year. I think a song like Real Gone Kid has become what it is because of it being played live. It was recorded like it was live."

In this respect the album will be similar to Raintown, which contained many tracks that had been well tried in smaller Glasgow venues.

But what will be the main differences between the albums?

"Musically this is a much more optimistic album than Raintown," said Ricky. "It's a bigger album than Raintown. Because of the band that we are and the people that we are, the city boundaries have been totally explored and the car has been driven down the motorway and we're well outside Glasgow. Raintown was an album that was very contained within Glasgow. It was very much a case of everything about Glasgow seeming to have an effect on the songs. On the new album, there is much less of a

feeling of that same pressure of the town, because we were away from it. And on this album there are two or three songs which are more looking at Glasgow from a distance. And there's a whole lot of stuff that is just brighter, more travelled and optimistic."

There are however, songs – Las Vegas and My America – which suggest the American visits have had an influence.

Not directly, claimed Ricky. "I just like the idea of using different places as an image for people. So both these songs sounds as if we've been to America, but they are both about people. I think it is part of the process of stepping out from your town – and you look for the biggest possible thing to describe what has happened to you. Obviously, America is that for a lot of people in Britain."

With the recording of the new record, the band seem to have adopted a new approach towards singles.

They were trying to adapt the songs as they have them towards radio play instead of either neglecting the need for singles or going out of their way to write more commercial songs.

Said Ricky: "I think there is a real stupidity if you don't face up to the problem of singles. Records cost a lot of money to make and to recoup that money you [... a few lines missing at the bottom of the page] People don't buy that many singles – it is just a vehicle to sell albums."

Said Dougie: "We just want the songs to have a chance on radio. Like Loaded could have done in the format it is in as a much better single. It was just that the way it was recorded and the sound was a bit wishy washy. Now, we're basically using the same kind of songs and making them more acceptable for radio."

Last word to Lorraine: "Mind you, there's no way we would ever record a ... that ... enough for an... {few lines missing at the bottom of the page}.

The day we walked out on Jacko

With a tour scheduled for October, it is perhaps in the live context that Deacon Blue have stood apart – probably as a result of their appreciation of what live music is about. "the way the band works," said Ricky, "is something like what Van Morrison did for me live. It's all about the moments – creating tension and the letting go of tension and maybe creating a moment within a song within a set that makes your heart stop and makes you want to go out and do something different, reorganise your life."

Lorraine added: "We were comparing the Michael Jackson show at Wembley with Van Morrison at Govan Town Hall. We left halfway through Michael Jackson. But with Van Morrison, I was all set to find his hotel and ask him to marry me! No! It was just like this really old, fat man and it was just magical – and we were standing bored stiff at Michael Jackson."

Deacon Blue have also managed to use the live show to put forward political ideas through songs like Loaded and Dignity, touching people without being boringly dogmatic. Ricky explained: "I think that in the context of music, when people come to a gig, they use it like going on holiday. They use it to reflect. They use it to stand with their girlfriend. They use it to think about home, or just to frame a lot of things because it is a day out. There is a time to reflect, and as a performer you have to identify common threads, and if that involves challenging or provoking people, then that's fine. My only worry about that

is we do similar routines in each place. We do a similar thing in Surrey as we do in Glasgow – it just doesn't go down as well. I don't want, by doing these things, people to see us as a ranting left wing political band. That closes doors. I think people identify strands in the songs that they want to hear more about. Our first single was Dignity, and that sums up any politics in the band. It is just a human thing that people identified with."

That's Deacon Blue in August 1988 – moving on with Dignity.