

M8 Magazine

Deacon Blue

(interview took place in Edinburgh on 1st December 1991 – probably published in January 1992)

Deacon Blue have, without reason, refused numerous requests since July for an interview with M8, much to the embarrassment of their press office. To appease those many Deacon Blue fans who've written in demanding more on their faves, we enclose an interview given to an English freelance journalist flown up to Edinburgh especially for the purpose.



A Scottish home gig for Deacon Blue involves an awful lot of bonding. Okay, so their birthplace is 100 miles down the road in Glasgow, but this date on a mild December night in Edinburgh has an undeniable homecoming feel to it.

A far from obvious set list (the anthemic singalongs Dignity, Real Gone Kid and I'll Never Fall In Love Again, are all conspicuous by their absence), the band are near impeccable live, creating an intimate aura that has the audience eating out of Ricky Ross's sweaty palm within mere minutes.

Post-gig backstage, the cramped area is stuffed with various relations of every age, all downing champagne, beer, peanuts, and heaps of coke (a cola). It's that kind of gig.

Deacon Blue may still be horribly unfashionable, with the music weeklies taking endless pleasure in ripping them to shreds, but for the three-thousand crowd in attendance tonight (and indeed, the rest of the nationwide sold out tour) they're the most important band on the planet.

Next morning in the hotel, over toast and honey, Ross's throat is a little worse for wear. Fast becoming a

global local hero, not quite all the world knows his name, but he's getting there. Their debut album, 1987's *Raintown*, sold upwards of 500,000 and then in '89 came *When The World Knows Your Name*, which elevated them from cult to star status. A veritable singles' album (the aforementioned *Real Gone Kid*, *Wages Day*, *Fergus Sings The Blues*), it swelled with grandiose production and just a little pomp.

If Deacon Blue had lost the inspired subtlety of their debut, then the current album, *Fellow Hoodlums* (far less breath-beating than their second, and much better), proves they have instead transformed into consummate, rather agreeable, professionals.

"The second album was hell to make," recalls Ricky. "It had a lot of singles on it and it brought us a lot of success (800,000 in the UK alone), but it was a really unhappy time. We were all too busy falling out. Everything has been sorted out though. And I think it shows, cos *Fellow Hoodlums* sounds far more relaxed and enjoyable. It's also the best we've produced so far."

The second album was indeed the bearer of mega-success for the band, but it also brought about a sharp turn-around within the pages of the music press. Where once they were heralded as Scotland's pride, now became a blatant case of Scottish snide. Ridiculed and reviled, Deacon Blue, it seemed, had lost their credibility overnight.

"I'm quite sure there is still an element in the press where people hate Scottish success," he claims. "All the bad press used to bother me, but now, if I read it at all, it actually amuses me. What's happened to us is almost the opposite of being damned by faint praise; we've been slaughtered by weak press! They write whatever they like 'cos it amuses them and their limited readership, but let's face it, these are kids magazines. I no longer care what they say. Y' know, I'm 34, so..."

Much of the extended digression was brought on by the sudden importance afforded to the music by the band themselves. Ross claimed Springsteen's *Tunnel Of Love* live show to be the greatest on earth, and proceeded to almost emulate it, with the band performing three-hour gigs, with no support. A little self-indulgent, perhaps?

"I just saw it as something that was there as a challenge," he states. "So we tried it, and realised that it doesn't necessarily work. We're back to two hours now, but I never understood why concerts had to remain a set time anyway. Nowadays, you get raves that last for twenty hours. Rock 'n' roll in all its formats is constantly changing, so why be afraid of trying something different?"

Having reached arena level (in a relatively short space of time), the next logical step inevitably had to be the Big Political Statement. It's all part of rock 'n' roll folklore as the ladder to success is ascended. Sting does it, so too does Bono, and of course, Jim Kerr. Ross however, had been quoted as saying that, "big political statements from rock stars are null and void, worthless, stupid". Yet, at 1990's *Big Day* concert in Glasgow, he dedicated a song (*Orphans*) to the local steelworkers (who had just been made redundant), and this apparent change in attitude invited even more scorn.

"What I hate is the gung-ho attitude by rock stars where they can say anything and the crowd'll cheer regardless. I was very uncomfortable at the idea of Mandela turning up at a pop concert. To me, for a man of that stature, it seems a little demeaning.

"And no, I didn't make a big political statement," he retorts. "All I did was dedicate that one song because Scotland had fallen on particularly hard times, so I said that the Labour Party had sold us down

the river, which at that time, they had. At that gig, there were a lot of very frustrated people who didn't have a voice. I said what I said but it's not something I'm going to make a habit of, and it's certainly not a power I'm going to abuse.

"But it was an important point," he continues. "You saw it at the gig last night. Whenever England is mentioned, Scots always boo. You should never underestimate just how much the Scots hate the English. And the reason is simple: Thatcher." (Shouldn't that be Major?). "We all vote Labour, the English vote Conservative, and the Tories win every time. Hence the hatred. I'm not condoning it. I think it's unfair, racist even, but the feeling is definitely there.

"Political statements don't work," he asserts. "But posing questions, and being genuinely angry does. It raises awareness. I think it's perfectly acceptable to be irate, but to just stand up and say 'vote Labour' is pretty pointless."

He may keep his politics personal then, but Ross lends his name to various local causes.

"I think that if it's an important enough issue, then we don't have the right to refuse it. You know, a lot of people pay a lot of money for our records and gig tickets. Especially in Glasgow. I actually think we should play for free in Glasgow. They built us up from the beginning and have stuck with us all the way. So when you get that kind of loyalty, you've got to give something back." (ND)