

WE'RE ROCK (AND ROLL) SOLID

LORRAINE McIntosh has been married for nearly 20 years. And despite the general rule that mixing business with pleasure is a recipe for disaster, she has worked with her husband for even longer, since she joined his band, Deacon Blue, in 1985.

So as she breezes in out of the rain for lunch at a cafe in Glasgow, wives everywhere could forgive her for having a wee moan about her other half for something or other – at the very least for getting on her nerves, considering they spend the majority of their time together.

But McIntosh and Ricky Ross are so in tune that, 15 years after Deacon Blue officially split, they have joined forces to release a new album, *The Great Lakes*, as a duo, called McIntosh Ross.

'I think it's just luck,' she says of their relationship. 'If you meet the right person, you can be happy. I think we are just right for each other.'

'Working together without the band doesn't feel that different, really. Ricky and I are always together – we've been married for 19 years, we live together, obviously, and although Ricky goes off quite often to do his songwriting, we always come back together.'

While Ross was the main songwriter for Deacon Blue, on this project the husband and wife have written together and both their voices are heard in equal measure, not just with McIntosh singing backing vocals as she did in the band – think of the famous 'woo-woooing' chorus of *Real Gone Kid*.

THE new album, recorded in Los Angeles and with a folk-country feel, was a chance for the pair to 'reflect' on the years spent together, both at home – where McIntosh is step-mother to Ross's eldest daughter, Caitlin, 21, and mother to their three children, Emer, 17, Georgia, 15, and eight-year-old Seamus – and also at work.

With songs such as *Queen of the New Year*, *Wages Day* and their anthem *Dignity*, Deacon Blue sold six million albums. At their peak, they even topped Madonna's *Like a Prayer* off the No 1 spot with their second album in 1989, *When The World Knows Your Name* – the follow-up to debut *Raintown*.

But there was never much opportunity to reflect when they were travelling the world, promoting their music and performing. They were heady days, but McIntosh says she did not take the time to acknowledge the success.

'I didn't absorb it at all really and I think it was partly a defence mechanism. I was really worried that people I knew in Glasgow would think I'd changed because our life had changed dramatically. I

They met in Deacon Blue 24 years ago, fell in love, married and are set to release their first album as a duo



by Maureen Culley

worked too hard to try and convince people nothing had changed.

'When *The World Knows Your Name* went straight to No 1 and someone asked if we were going to have a party and, even though I was brought up Catholic, I had that sort of Scottish Presbyterian thing going on where I was just like, "No. No parties. No celebration".'

'It's not like that now, though. Anything along the way, we celebrate.'

We are in Cafe Gandolfi, a favourite haunt in the Merchant City. McIntosh – with black curls in place and dressed in jeans and a cardigan – is sipping on a soda and lime as the rain batters on the windows. She has to get home soon to the couple's five-bedroom Victorian villa on the city's South Side for a celebratory dinner, to bid farewell to their eldest, who is going abroad to study.

Recalling her days in the band, she says jet-setting around the globe with five guys was not always easy.

'Before the band split up,' she says, 'I think I had really just had enough of being on the road.'

It was particularly hard for the others when Ross and McIntosh got together.

'Bands are very intense environments,' she says. 'You've got all these people wanting their input, their say and their place.'

'I had just been a backing singer and even though I became quite an important member of the band, to be a partner with the band's creator obviously put me in a different position.'

'For a good few years, that changed my relationship with the guys in the band. But, over time, that resolved itself.'

McIntosh, 45, was brought up in Cumnock, Ayrshire, and lost her mother to leukaemia when she was 11. With her father working long hours at the colliery, she would come home from school each day and cook the evening meal,

taking on a grown-up role all too quickly.

'Before my mother died, I had a nice childhood – then it took a dramatic turn,' she says. 'I suppose it made me more aware that childhood is a precious time.'

At 21, she began a teaching degree in Glasgow, but was always drawn to music. She used to busk in Buchanan Street, she says, but admits this revelation will 'mortify' her daughters.

'My brother and I were busking one night and Ricky had been rehearsing with an early incarnation of Deacon Blue in a basement room in Buchanan Street.'

'The funny thing is, we were singing one of his songs we'd heard off an early album of his. We knew him through friends and liked his music. But it was a bit embarrassing when we saw him as we were doing really well and I felt like we should maybe give him some of our money.'

Ross loved her voice and felt her presence lit up the line-up, so McIntosh's fate was sealed.

SHE says: 'I've always loved singing. My dad was a great singer and when we used to go on holiday to Ireland, where my mum was from, we would sing in the pubs.'

'I think that's why I'm a harmony singer, as I always sang harmony with my dad and my brother and just loved it. I knew it was for me.'

'I sing all the time. I sing more than Ricky. He couldn't survive if he could never write another song but I simply couldn't live without the singing.'

Things really took off in 1988 when *Real Gone Kid* became a huge radio hit, peaking at No 8 in the UK charts, helping their second album to No 1 and seeing them travel the world.

She says: 'I remember being in Washington DC and every-one going off to see the White



In perfect harmony: Husband and wife team Ricky Ross and Lorraine McIntosh

House and me just staying in my room for a wee rest. It was tiring.'

Touring became even more gruelling in 1992 when she gave birth to Emer.

'We had a nanny, but I wanted to do as much as possible. I loved being a mum,' she says.

ONE incident en route to the Far East is still fresh in her mind. 'I remember we went to Japan when Emer was ten months and the nanny said she'd take Emer to the back of the plane, so I could rest for a gig when we got there. But I didn't want that.'

'I only wanted to hand Emer over if I absolutely had to – if I was about to go on stage. So I kept her with me. I was knackered when I got there, but that's what I wanted.'

'It's still not easy, even now. We'll be doing shows soon with this album and that'll be hard. The kids are all at different stages, but they still need you at every age.'

As well as Deacon Blue getting together intermittently in recent years to tour, while Ross, 51, writes songs and works as a radio presenter, his wife has turned to acting.

She appeared in the Ken Loach movie *My Name is Joe* in 1998 and joined *River City* in 2002, finishing up on the *Scots* soap in 2006. Most recently, she appeared in the BBC1 drama *Hope Springs*.

Although she still wants to act, her focus for now is on *The Great Lakes*, which evolved from time spent 'knocking about' in their recording studio at home.

'I'd say, "Why don't you write a song about this?" And Ricky would say, "Why don't you?" Then he said, "Why don't we make a record together, of songs that come up organically between us both, whether you write them or I write them?"'

'It was a chance for us to reflect on our life together. We're happy where we are and the fact we're together.'

● *The Great Lakes* is released on September 28. McIntosh Ross tour dates are available at www.mcintoshross.com

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