BIOGRAPHY

DEACON BLUE

The storybook ascent of Deacon Blue would not be out of place as the subject of one of their own songs. Witness the group's humble, ragtag beginnings, slogging around Glasgow, a city where every act, according to founding member Ricky Ross, "is expected to be either a funky white soul band or some mutant offspring of the Velvet Underground." Deacon Blue would be neither. In fact, songs like "Dignity," "Raintown," and "Chocolate Girl" echoed a working-class ethic more reminiscent of Woody Guthrie and James Joyce than anything on the U.K. charts in 1987.

Deacon Blue was destined to capture the imagination and captivate the soul of many a British fan. It happened with a string of thought-provoking singles (each one gaining a higher foothold on the charts, peaking with the top ten "Real Gone Kid"), coupled with grass-roots college and club tours. Fully two years elapsed between the first (**Raintown**) and second (**When the World Knows Your Name**) albums, but by 1989 Deacon Blue had become headliners. They had been nominated for a BRIT award (akin to our Grammy), sold-out in-advance every date of a 30-city U.K. tour (including three nights at Hammersmith Odeon), and watched as their latest album displaced Madonna at #1 on the national chart.

And the wonder of it all was that they did it without compromising any of the intense emotion that informed their best work. "Fergus Sings the Blues," "Wages Day," and "Queen of the New Year" expanded the band's musical horizons, but they also continued to reflect a Celtic fascination with American R&B, consistent with Deacon Blue's commitment to hometown roots-rock. This would be a cornerstone of their appeal to U.S. fans on sold-out sro tours that summer-fall; likewise, back in Glasgow, where they headlined to 250,000 at "The Big Day" free concert in June.

As this flashback sequence begins to fade and the present begins to come into clear view, Deacon Blue has attained a level of success that they dared not dream of a half-decade ago. Their first two albums have long-since passed multi-platinum status in the U.K. This earned them the chance to release two personal projects in 1990: a four-song EP of Burt Bacharach-Hal David songs; and a double-album of B sides, film tracks and sessions entitled **Ooh Las Vegas**. Both of these unusual collections moved inside the top five on the British charts, and set the stage for the release of an eagerly-awaited new studio recording.

FELLOW HOODLUMS, Deacon Blue's third album, finds them continuing to stretch the boundaries of traditional song, from the beauty of "A Brighter Star Than You Will Shine" to the bittersweet "Closing Time." Yet they remain true to a certain dreamy, romantic ideal of lost-and-found love, as in "Your Swaying Arms," a rich and uplifting ballad which was the first U.K. single and video (filmed in Glasgow, and directed by Jim Gillespie). A second single, "Twist and Shout," jumped nearly 20 points inside the U.K. top 20 in after a fortnight on the street.

FELLOW HOODLUMS debuted at #2 as the "Album of the Week" on the U.K. chart. It reunites Deacon Blue with Jon Kelly, who produced **Raintown** nearly five years ago. The new album was recorded in Paris and Glasgow by Steve Jackson (who engineered the project) with additional recording by Robin Rankin. Deacon Blue traveled to New York in the early spring '91 to complete the mixing of the album with Michael Brauer (whose recent credits include the Rolling Stones' "Highwire" single).

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DEACON BLUE - A CHRONOLOGY

1983: Ricky Ross, a former school teacher and youth leader in Dundee, moves to Glasgow. Working as an English teacher, his earliest (part-time) musical ventures are varied, but include the release of a cassette album of piano-vocal based compositions. Around the same period he becomes involved as keyboard player with another local band, Woza.

1984: The inability to have his songs accepted within the structure of the band leads to his departure, and the start of a quest that ends with the formation of Deacon Blue. "I was writing songs and not getting any use of them. I wanted to try and get a publishing deal of some kind so that I could maybe get songs placed with other acts."

1985: Ricky puts together an 11-track song publishing demo which attracts the attention of ATV Music. However, the deal is contingent upon him performing with a band. He pieces together various line-ups, initially as ad hoc groups. The idea of a band then becomes a more focused part of his ambitions. The first member to be recruited is Douglas Vipond, whose classical and jazz training do not prevent his involvement with rock bands like the Big Dish and the Painted Word. Next to join is guitarist Graeme Kelling. Jim Prime, a veteran of tours and recording sessions with John Martyn and the early-'80s pop group Altered Images, is brought out of a period of semi-retirement (in which he had gotten married and gone to work in a bank's computer center) to join the band on keyboards. Bassist Ewen Vernal, who played with Ricky in Woza, is similarly lured out of his jazz projects to complete the group -- which is dubbed Deacon Blue by Ross (after "Deacon Blues," a song on Steely Dan's Aja album). The band is gigging regularly by the start of the next year, attracting a core following by virtue of appearances at some of Glasgow's smaller venues (The Fixx, Club Eden).

August, 1986: Gordon Charlton of CBS Records U.K., in Glasgow to check another band, hears Deacon Blue's demo tape and is immediately impressed, particularly by the song "Dignity." Charlton persuades A&R head Muff Winwood to see the band at a showcase gig in Glasgow, which leads to Deacon Blue signing a recording contract with CBS Records U.K. By the autumn, they are opening for Sandie Shaw and Lone Justice at university concerts in the north of England. Backing singer Lorraine McIntosh (described by New Musical Express as "a diminutive Betty Boop lookalike with a vivacious singing voice"), who performed with Ewen Vernal in the Glasgow band Big Sur, becomes involved in studio demos and live gigs.

November, 1986: The band's premiere at the Marquee Club piques the attention of London's pop music aficionados.

December, 1986: Deacon Blue, together with Lorraine, starts to record its first album at AIR Studios in London. The producer is Jon Kelly, whose credits include Kate Bush, Paul McCartney and the Damned.

March, 1987: "Dignity," the first single release is backed up with an extensive British club and college tour, at which point Lorraine officially joins the band.

April, 1987: Deacon Blue makes its first U.K. television appearance, on TV-am's "Wide Awake" program.

May, 1987: Raintown., the first album, is released to favorable press reviews. Deacon Blue plays another 11 dates, part of their plan to build a committed live audience; by the end of the year they will have played 90 shows.

June, 1987: "Loaded," the second single, is released. While neither of the first two singles make the expected impact on the charts, they nonetheless back-up the continual touring and help the band's reputation considerably. Their concert schedule includes support gigs with Bruce Hornsby at Hammersmith Odeon; and with Ben E. King at the Birmingham Hippodrome and Manchester Palace. They play their first European show in Holland on June 29th; followed by a live TV date in Munich.

August, 1987: "When Will You (Make My Telephone Ring)," the third single, is released. It makes the lower reaches of the British chart in the autumn, the first tangible sign that Deacon Blue's constant live performances have established an audience base and are turning into record sales.

September, 1987: Deacon Blue completes its first European tour, appearing in Germany and Holland. They then embark on another British tour.

November, 1987: "Dignity" is re-recorded with top hitmaking American producer Bob Clearmountain at the controls this time. Deacon Blue resumes its live schedule with a series of dates in Scotland.

January, 1988: The new version of "Dignity" is released as a single in no less than 5 vinyl and CD configurations; it quickly hits #31 on the U.K. chart, clear evidence that Deacon Blue is at the start of an incredible new year. At the end of the month the band returns to Europe for shows in Italy and Spain.

February, 1988: Raintown is re-released as a limited edition double-LP coupled with Riches, 11-track collection of B sides, unreleased tracks and live recordings.

March, 1988: Raintown album is released in the U.S., preceded by "Dignity" as the first U.S. single. At the same time, "When Will You (Make My Telephone Ring)" is re-released in the U.K., and peaks at #34. Both hit singles re-focus attention on the album, which begins a 74 week run on the U.K. charts. The album eventually reaches U.K. gold (100,000 units) in the autumn.

April, 1988: Now appearing in 2,000-seat halls across the country, Deacon Blue sells-out in advance two shows at Barrowlands in Glasgow. They also start work on new material for their second album, produced by Warne Livesey (known for his work on The The's groundbreaking album, Infected), and mixed by Bob Clearmountain.

July, 1988: "Chocolate Girl" b/w "Love's Great Fears," the fourth and final single (remixed by Michael Brauer), is released to heavy radio airplay, ultimately reaching #43 on the U.K. chart.

August, 1988: Summer festival gigs in Inverness, Edinburgh, Lorlent and Reading.

October, 1988: "Real Gone Kid," a new single, is released as a prelude to the upcoming album; it becomes Deacon Blue's biggest U.K. hit single to date, reaching #8. This earns them their first "Top of the Pops" TV appearance, as they embark on a 15-date tour of theaters across Great Britain. One highlight is the RDS Stadium in Dublin, on a bill with Hot House Flowers, Tracy Chapman, and Aswad. The new single also provides Deacon Blue with their first major success abroad, reaching #1 in Spain, and top 20 in Australia and throughout Europe.

February, 1989: "Wages Day," another new single from the new album, reaches #18. Meanwhile, "Real Gone Kid" is nominated for a 'BRIT' award, the British equivalent of our Grammy award.

April, 1989: When The World Knows Your Name, the second album, is released and enters the U.K. chart at #1, displacing Madonna's Like a Prayer. U.K. album sales surpass 400,000 units (U.K. double-platinum) within eight weeks. The band plays an Anti-Poll Tax show at Edinburgh's Usher Hall, April Fool's Day; and two benefit gigs for the Lockerbie Disaster Fund at Dam Park Hall in Ayr later that month.

May, 1989: "Fergus Sings the Blues," third single from the new album, reaches #14. Their biggest tour (to that point) -- 22 dates in the course of the month, completely sold-out in-advance -- includes two nights at SECC in Glasgow, three shows at Hammersmith Odeon, and two concerts at the Edinburgh Playhouse. The Scottish dates alone sell-out their 21,000 tickets faster than any major-name touring band in years (including U2 and Simple Minds). All this sets the stage for Deacon Blue's North American debut.

June, 1989: When The World Knows Your Name released in the U.S. Robert Hilburn praises Deacon Blue in the Los Angeles Times as "one of several up-and-coming British bands that aim for rock's guitar-oriented, American-roots mainstream"; goes on to compare the philosophy of Ricky Ross to "the rock-as-inspiration qualities of Bruce Springsteen and U2... [Ross] injects in the music the themes -- being true to an ideal and facing up to challenges -- that are reminiscent of the ambition and scope of Springsteen's work."

July, 1989: Deacon Blue's first Australian tour comprises 14 concerts in Perth, Fremantle, Melbourne, Adelaide, Sydney, Newcastle and Brisbane.

August, 1989: 7-city North American tour (San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, Washington DC, Boston, Toronto) brings the band to the colonies. "The music of Deacon Blue can fit in wherever Western pop is known," writes the Washington Post's Mark Jenkins of the Bayou show, "from Hong Kong to Leningrad to Sydney ... artfully constructed and confidently performed." "Real Gone Kid" b/w "Little Lincoln" (B side unavailable on album) is issued as the new U.S. single.

September, 1989: "Love and Regret," the fourth U.K. single from the album, is released; it reaches #28 on the national chart.

October-November, 1989: Second leg of North American tour opens on Halloween, covering 11 cities (Toronto, Philadelphia, Boston, Washington DC, New York, Minneapolis, Detroit, Portland, Seattle, Los Angeles, San Francisco).

December, 1989: 13-date British homecoming tour includes two nights at SECC in Glasgow (venue's fastest-selling event ever, 20,000 tickets sold in a day); the National Exhibition Centre in Birmingham; two nights at Wembley; closing with two nights at Glasgow Barrowlands. "Queen of the New Year" is released two days after Christmas, fourth and final U.K. single from the album; it reaches #21 early 1990.

April, 1990: The band plays five dates in Italy, France and Spain.

May, 1990: Deacon Blue performs "A Hard Day's Night" at "Imagine," the John Lennon memorial concert at Liverpool Pier Head. Worldwide telecast also stars Joe Cocker, Natalie Cole, Dave Edmunds, Hall & Oates, Lenny Kravitz, Cyndi Lauper, Sean Lennon, Yoko Ono, Lou Reed, and Wet Wet Wet.

June, 1990: Deacon Blue headlines "The Big Day" on June 3rd in front of 250,000 people as part of Glasgow's European City of Culture Year; biggest free concert in Britain (over 3-times the size of a Wembley show), also telecast live. Others on the bill are the Associates, Hot House Flowers, Hue & Cry (fellow Scottish group with whom Jim, Ewen and Doug were collaborating), John Martyn, Youssou N'Dour, Eddi Reader, the Silencers, and Jimmy Somerville. Deacon Blue also plays Glastonbury Festival (to over 100,000 fans, co-starring Hot House Flowers and Ry Cooder), and Roskilde Festival the same month.

July, 1990: Deacon Blue headlines "A Day For Scotland," day-long festival held directly underneath Stirling Castle, July 14th. The bill also features Hue & Cry, Runrig, and the Shamen. Later in the month, Deacon Blue plays Turin, Italy date.

August, 1990: **Four Bacharach and David Songs** EP reaches #2 on U.K. chart, produced by Jon Kelly, engineered by Robin Rankin, recorded at Ca Va Sound Workshop in Glasgow. Titles include "I'll Never Fall In Love Again" (subject of a promo video), "The Look Of Love," "Message To Michael," and "Are You There With Another Girl?" the latter marking Lorraine's debut as a lead vocalist.

September, 1990: **Ooh Las Vegas** double-album comprising 23 B sides, film tracks, cover tunes, and unreleased sessions reaches #3 on U.K. charts. **The Big Picture** long-form video also released, directed by Meiert Avis, filmed at Christmas '89 SECC/Glasgow concert. Band embarks on British and European tour, including multi-night engagements in Aberdeen, Birmingham, and Wembley. By this time, **Raintown** has sold over 500,000 copies in the U.K. (two and a half-times platinum), reached #14, and spent 74 weeks on the charts; while the #1 **When The World Knows Your Name** has sold over 800,000 copies in the U.K. (quadruple-platinum).

October, 1990: Final shows of the year take place in Holland, Germany and Spain.

November, 1990: Deacon Blue returns home to Glasgow and re-appraises the huge number of stadium shows they have played. They decide their next major tour will return to the intimacy of theater venues, allowing for better communication between band and audience, plus superior sound/production values.

January, 1991: Deacon Blue organizes and contributes "Christmas and Glasgow" to **The Tree and the Bird and the Fish and the Bell**, a compilation album of Glasgow acts, including the Big Dish, Blue Nile, Lloyd Cole, Hue & Cry, Wet Wet Wet, Texas and others. The album is dedicated to Glasgow photographer Oscar Marzaroli, whose work comprises a very personal record of post-war Scotland. (One of his photographs is used as the front cover of Deacon Blue's **Raintown** album.) All profits from this benefit album help establish the Oscar Marzaroli Trust (of which Ricky Ross is now a trustee), created to preserve Marzaroli's work and provide facilities for young Scottish photographers.

At the same time, Deacon Blue reunites with producer Jon Kelly to begin recording their next album. Sessions take place in Paris, but Ross and Prime return to Glasgow in order to perform at the launch reception for the Marzaroli album at the Renfrew Ferry Gallery, January 21st.

March, 1991: The band appear as themselves in William McIlvaney's BBC-TV play, Dreaming, for which they have recorded four specially-commissioned songs and incidental soundtrack music (included on **Ooh Las Vegas**). Deacon Blue then travels to New York City to complete the mixing of their next album with Michael Brauer.

June, 1991: "Your Swaying Arms," a new U.K. single, is released as the prelude to the upcoming album; the song reaches #23 one week after release.

July, 1991: **FELLOW HOODLUMS**, Deacon Blue's third album, is released in the U.K., where it enters the charts in the #2 position. Later in the month, a second single is issued, "Twist and Shout," which enters the U.K. chart at #34 and jumps to #16 its second week out (as of this writing).

August, 1991: **FELLOW HOODLUMS** is released in North America.