Ricky and Lorraine hit some high notes during the Deacon Blue years and Ricky had a chilling moment in Nashville when he felt the presence of Roy Orbison

I WILL SHOW MY HUBBY WHO'S ROSS

Deacon Blue Lorraine takes lead on tour with Ricky

They recorded in California, hooked up with Bob Dylan's producer and felt the ghost of Roy Orbison while writing new songs.

By PAUL ENGLISH

But when the Orange Walk marched through the photo-shoot for their new album, Ricky Ross and Lorraine McIntosh could only be in one place – Glasgow.

The couple had chosen the Trongate cafe Val D'Oro with its retro-kitsch feel for the cover shot of their new album The Great Lakes, the first as duo McIntosh Ross.

It's an apt location yards from Glasgow's Barrowland ballroom, the scene of some of their finest live moments with Deacon Blue.

But as they settled into the shoot with New York photographer Marisa Privitera, wife of Belle & Sebastian singer Stuart Murdoch, one of Glasgow's other famous musical institutions paraded by.

Drinking coffee in Café Gandolfi in the Merchant City, Ricky and Lorraine laugh as they recall how the two from The Blue were held up by the Orange several weeks before.

Lorraine says: "We were about to do some recording for our website when the Orange Walk came by at 10 o'clock in the morning. Only in Glasgow."

In the context of the album, though, the anecdote isn't that out of place. The new McIntosh Ross album might hum with the sound of alternative Americana thanks to an array of revered session musicians with their pedal steels and banjos.

But with soaring harmonies and big choruses the sound is unmistakably Deacon Two. The pair didn't intentionally set out to write a duets album together. Some of the songs had been left on the backburner, or, in Lorraine's case, stored on a dictaphone and ignored.

It was, she says, a daunting prospect to go from backing singer to songwriter and lead vocalist – even though she thinks nothing of singing solo numbers with her band in front of thousands. It took me years to build up to doing that," says Lorraine, laughing. "It's a confidence thing. When we recorded with the guys in America, I was worried they'd hear my lead vocals and say 'yeah, that's nice, lady, but we prefer the guy singing.'

"In some respects it would have been easier to do separately because I'm so used to being the person who provides backing vocals for Ricky.

"But he's doing that on some of my songs now. So, finally I know what a great job I did all those years..."

As the songwriting force behind Deacon Blue's chart-topping albums, Ricky, 51, always encouraged his wife to step out of the shadows.

But while he recorded four solo LPs, carved out a niche as a Radio Scotland music presenter and wrote pop songs for mainstream acts like James Blunt, Will Young, Jamie Cullum and Ronan Keating, Lorraine became an actress.

She acted in films like Wilbur Wants To Kill Himself, My Name Is Joe and BBC Scotland shows River City and Hope Springs, and also appears in TV comedy Happy Hollidays next month. Singing, though, is what the 45-year-old loves most. She says: "When I'm doing a lot of acting, I realise that singing is what I was made to do. I get to scratch that itch when I go out with Deacon Blue, but it was good to do something completely different.

"I'd pick the guitar up over the years and write little bits of songs and play them to Ricky. He told me to record them on a dictaphone.

"But I never saw myself as a songwriter. Eventually Ricky said he had material that would work for us too. I never thought it would get to the recording stage."

Ricky adds: "I'm always working on songs. But I came across stuff Lorraine had done, and some of it was really good. There's one called This World Is Not My Home which was more or less complete.

"A lot of my time is spent writing pop for others. But sometimes you want to write songs just because you want to. That's what we've done." Having nailed a batch of demos in Glasgow, they headed to Los Angeles where they'd recorded years before.

"I worried about being away from our three children for two weeks," admits Lorraine.

"But we couldn't have done it in Glasgow. I'd be nipping out the studio to take our son to Cubs."

Once Stateside, the singers hooked up with a team of highly-successful session musicians who work with Bruce Springsteen and Emmylou Harris. Bob Dylan and Roy Orbison also gave a helping hand in one way or another.

Ricky says: "Our producer Mark Howard had been working with Dylan. He played us this recording of Bob talking in the studio. It was incredible listening to him telling stories."

As if that weren't enough, Ricky reckons the sessions were transcended by yet another luminary. He says: "I'd been writing songs in Nashville the last couple of years and when I was there I went into the Orbison Building.

"Afterwards it felt a bit like having Roy Orbison as a ghost on my shoulder. I could almost feel that presence."

Deacon Blue will play the Homecoming Final Fling at Glasgow's SECC in November, with the possibility of new material beyond that. "The band are in a great place at the moment," says Ricky. "But we can't tour unless we have fresh material. There's no point."

There's also a special show with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra and Belle & Sebastian spin-off project God Help The Girl scheduled for Edinburgh's Usher Hall on November 29.

But Ricky is unlikely to play the oldies for the sake of it while touring The Great Lakes across the UK through Autumn.

He says: "We don't want folk to expect a Deacon Blue show."

Lorraine though, isn't ruling anything out. "The thought of going out to do a gig with no rapturous cheers for Deacon Blue songs will be a challenge, in a good way," she says. "Or at least I hope so. Maybe if things turn violent we'll do Dignity…"

● McIntosh Ross' single All My Trust I Place In You is out tomorrow. The Great Lakes is out on September 28. They play Iron Works in Inverness, Aberdeen's Lemon Tree and Glasgow's Oran Mor on November 4, 5 and 6.