McIntosh Ross

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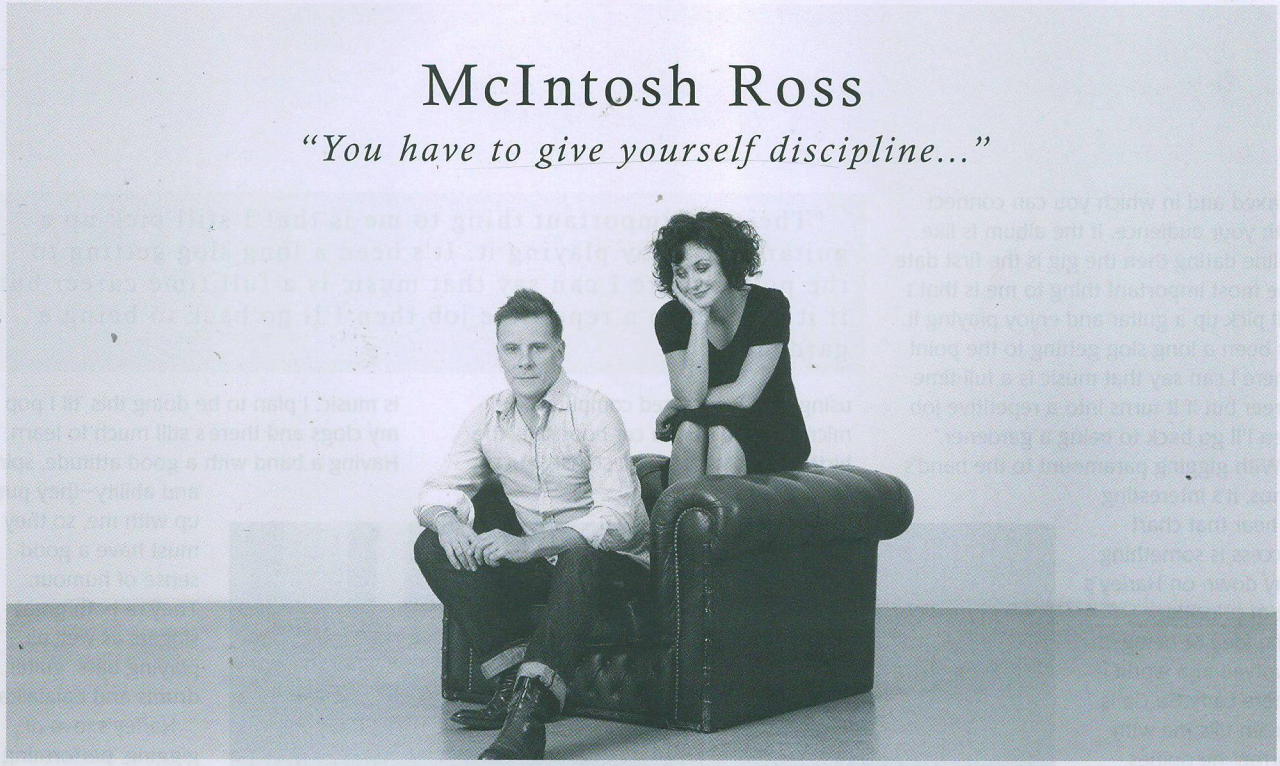

It was just nice to try a different project. I'm a great believer in people doing different things. If I have any regrets, it's not doing more projects earlier on."

The Scottish musician Ricky Ross does not come across as a man who does regret. Along with wife Lorraine McIntosh, he was part of Deacon Blue, one of the biggest bands in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Since then, he has carved himself a niche as a songwriter to the stars, having produced hits for Ronan Keating, Nanci Griffith and Will Young, among others.

Deacon Blue still get together now and then, but last year Ross did something a little more leftfield by teaming up with his wife, under the band-name McIntosh Ross and they released an album of stunning Americana entitled THE GREAT LAKES.

It showed a slightly more understated side to the singer behind such 1980s anthems as *Real Gone Kid*, *Wages Day* and *Dignity*.

"It was really just to do with the songs," Ross tells me. "It came about by writing songs together and we thought it wasn't really Deacon Blue."

The husband and wife team headed off to Los Angeles to record the album and recruited a crack team of session musicians, who between them had worked with Emmylou Harris, Lucinda Williams and the Neville Brothers. It was a bold, not to mention risky, move to make for a couple who have been well-known on the British music scene for more than 20 years.

"At the time, we were looking to work with people we didn't know," Ross adds. "We wanted to get people who make the kind of record that we enjoy listening to. I've always been a real fan of country-rock—like the Flying Burrito Brothers and Gram Parsons, but I really didn't know much about it. I ended up going to Nashville about three years ago. It was my first visit there. That coincided with me being asked to do a radio show for BBC Radio Scotland with the emphasis on country music," says Ross.

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And, as Ross admits, Celtic music has always had a big influence on American folk traditions. "Scottish songs have always been about storytelling and that fits in with country music," he adds.

There was also the added pressure of working and writing songs with his wife, as opposed to any other musician. "We like a lot of the same things," explains a laughing Ross. "The only problem is that you don't necessarily make much time for it. We found recently, it's easier to set time aside. I write a lot with other people. You usually give yourself an uninterrupted day. You have to give yourself the discipline."

One of the highlights of THE GREAT LAKES is the a cappella spiritual song *Jesus Nailed My Sins Upon The Tree*. "That was just something we decided to do on the last day," explains Ross.

"It's always good fun to sing together. It's something that everyone should do. One of the core things of this record was that everyone was working together live in the room. People have forgotten that you can get five people in a room and make music. You can start rehearsing in the morning and by lunchtime the record is done. It's not that difficult to do. It's how lots of people's favourite records were made. It doesn't happen often enough."

Ross has certainly come a long way since he was a young upstart on the Glasgow music scene, back in the mid-1980s. Did he ever think he would end up making a record like this? "Funnily enough, I probably did! I now know a lot about who is who, but back then I did know who Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings were. I love pedal steel. I loved it on Neil Young's records. My first solo record had [ex-Doobie Brothers] Jeff Baxter playing pedal steel. In early interviews, I used to say Deacon Blue could end up being a country band. It would have delighted me."

Deacon Blue was formed in 1986 and swiftly began one of Scotland's biggest bands. Their songs defined a generation despite their guitar-based pop seemingly