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# music

## pop

## duncan seaman

**W**ITH his Brit award-winning band The Fratellis "officially on its holidays", singer Jon Lawler could be forgiven for kicking back and relaxing.

But not a bit of it. This month the Glaswegian re-emerges with his new group Codeine Velvet Club and an entirely new sound, homaging the orchestral pop on the 1960s. CVC are essentially a duo, featuring 30-year-old Jon and his fellow Scot, the burlesque singer Lou Hickey. They were paired up by Jon's wife, initially to help out with a song for her friend Lou's next solo album, but something clicked immediately and an "intrigued" Jon was eager to continue working his new foil. "I wondered what else we could do," he explains on crackly mobile phone line while shuttling between radio promo sessions.

"It seemed to make some sense to give it a go. Before long we had an album." The sweeping strings of their debut single *Vanity Kills* suggest Codeine Velvet Club are pursuing a cinematic path, creating a soundtrack for some imaginary Bond-like film. Jon sounds uncertain that this was their original intention. "I was not overly conscious that it was [the case]," he says. "Most people I know have got pretty large record collections. I don't know anybody who sticks to one thing." "At the time we were writing these songs I must have been in that kind of mood. You have to let it go that way. If were to make another album it might not be in that mood." Critics have noted the influence of John Barry, though again, Jon says, this was unconscious. "I did not own a John Barry record until 10 days ago. That music can be quite general, without



**NO RULES:** Jon Lawler and Lou Hickey

being a fan of one exponent of it. You can't watch a film from the Sixties without it seeping into your head. It was more general than [John Barry]. "The other example I've heard was Lee Hazlewood and Nancy Sinatra. I'd never heard of Lee Hazlewood. I should be embarrassed about that but I'm not. To some people listening the influences might seem obvious, but it's probably the case for most people that write or make music that there's not always a direct influence. The orchestral, John Barry thing was more general." He adds: "We were trying to put as

much as possible into the record, as many colours as we could. There were not any rules on a particular style that the album should have." In an attempt to get under the skin of the project Jon, at one stage, stayed at the Chateau Marmont, the hotel on Sunset Boulevard that has played host to everyone from Greta Garbo to Led Zeppelin. The actor John Belushi died of a drug overdose in one of its garden bungalows. It was there that Jon wrote several songs. "There was definitely an intention at one point of trying to creep into Hollywood,"

he says. "That was half-conscious, half just having more fun. The last couple of songs that I wrote for the album were done there – one made it on to the record, the other didn't. I was a little bit conscious of trying to find something to write about. That probably won't ever happen again but there was something about tapping into that place that made sense."

Another of the songs on the album, *I Would Send You Roses*, was salvaged from an aborted collaboration with Roger Daltrey. "He had suggested one of the times that we met that we should do some stuff together," Jon explains. "Once I got over the state of shock of him saying that I went home and got to work on a couple of things, one of which was *I Would Send You Roses*. But it never happened. It meant we were able to use it for this. It's good, it breaks up the album nicely. It's a complete blast when we play it live."

Now the band are readying themselves for their first tour (which calls at the Cockpit in Leeds on Friday, November 20). To date they've only played four gigs and the reaction was initially puzzlement. "Nobody knew what to expect," says Jon. "One of the great things about starting something from scratch is, if you are lucky enough, you get to see an audience changing. They went from bewilderment to huge grins at the end. It's rewarding."

As for whether Codeine Velvet Club will continue beyond this album, Jon is unsure. "I guess it will all depend on how this goes. Three things might happen – it might go well and well keep that going, it might not or it might take a while to build up."

"After all that hard work we put in it would be a shame to stop at that point." Hinting perhaps that the Fratellis' "holiday" may be more than a temporary vacation, he adds: "I've no concrete plans at the moment – other than to do this."

● **Codeine Velvet Club is released on Monday. Tickets for the gig at the Cockpit are available from Jumbo or Crash Records or from [www.lunatickets.co.uk](http://www.lunatickets.co.uk). [www.codeinevelvetclub.com](http://www.codeinevelvetclub.com)**

## STEVE HACKETT

OUT OF THE TUNNEL'S MOUTH

★★★★☆

## JIM McCARTY

SITTING ON THE TOP OF TIME

★★★★☆

## PETER BARTON & JERRY DONAHUE

FALLEN

★★★☆☆

Out of all the former member of prog rock band Genesis, it's arguably guitarist Steve Hackett that has enjoyed the most rewarding solo career, turning out an assortment of well-received rock, solo acoustic guitar and orchestral works. *Out Of The Tunnel's Mouth* follows the rock album template and features the now familiar mix of adventurous world music-flavoured prog and theatrical rock workouts where Hackett – assisted by talented players including old pal Roger King on keyboards and pigtailed ex-Kajagoogoo man Nick Beggs on bass – once again proves he's got a way with spooky chord progressions and scorching, goosebump-raising guitar solos.

You might even detect some heightened emotions on songs like *Emerald And Ash* that appear to stem from the recent sad collapse of his 32-year marriage to Brazilian artist Kim Poor.

[www.hackettsongs.com](http://www.hackettsongs.com)

By coincidence Hackett also pops up on the new solo album from former

## HAYLEY WESTENRA

WINTER MAGIC

★★★★☆

I used to be of the opinion that if you were describing something as 'classical crossover' you were using 15 letters more than necessary when the word 'pop' would suffice.

So, it's either my advancing years or an early injection of festive spirit that's led me to enjoy the new album from young Kiwi songstress Hayley Westenra so much. That, and the fact, that after being exposed to Sting's gruff seasonal offering this sounds like a flypast of heaven on the back of Santa's sled.

Westenra, who's so clean cut she makes Mary Poppins look like Betty Page and has a voice to match, is facing strong competition from the likes of Katherine Jenkins, Faryl Smith

Yardbird and Renaissance man Jim McCarty, his first in 16 years. Although primarily a drummer, McCarty's been stockpiling a bunch of warmly melodic songs and lovely instrumentals which include Knopfler-esque shuffles and mellow old-school psychedelia. Delivered by a bunch of highly talented players, with pianist Donald Quan's energetic and fleet-fingered skills taking the lead on

# albums

## martin ross

and Susan Boyle in the classical crossover charts this Christmas, but her effort, with its integrity and modest lack of showboating, deserves to lead the pack.

Yes, it is very sweet and at times slushy, but never cloying or insincere, and it manages to cover some interesting terrain, from the entirely choral *The Coventry Carol* to the gently poppy *All With You* and *Peace Shall Come*.

Following the winter theme of the title, the album's not entirely focused on Christmas tunes and there are surprises like an icily beautiful version of Joni Mitchell's *River*. Those that are

many of the tracks and featuring McCarty's quietly introspective lyrics sung in a homely voice not far removed from Ozzy Osbourne's latterday careworn tones, *Sitting On The Top Of Time* is a must-have for Renaissance fans.

## EASY ACTION

Also making the most of the opportunities that the internet afford in extending their careers are former The Animals man Peter



festive numbers are either not obvious choices or are given fresh treatments, like the twinkly takes on *Veni Veni Emmanuel* and *Corpus Christi Carol*.

**DECCA**

Barton and Fotheringay and Fairport Convention guitarist Jerry Donahue.

Unlike the focussed efforts from Hackett and McCarty, their bluesy sax-bolstered boogieing and US-style soft rock balladry suffers from weedy production and an obvious inability on their part to discriminate between what is classic and what is hopelessly dated.

**ORGANIC MOUNTAIN**