



DANNY BRYANT

just as i am

British blues guitarist Danny Bryant has made a big impact on the international blues scene and with his latest album, *JUST AS I AM*, is all set to take his music to a much wider audience. His whole music career is very much a family affair. His Red Eye Band comprises his dad Ken Bryant on bass alongside drummer Trevor Barr, and Danny's mum is his manager. Danny's own involvement in music goes back to his mid-teen years.

"I picked up the guitar when I was fifteen, I am 29 now," he explains. "I had wanted one for about 6 months, I think most people of that age do. I was fifteen and it pretty much became an obsession straight away, it was lucky I ended up being a professional musician as probably the wrong time to get one when you are fifteen and starting to do your GCSEs."

It is quite unusual for a teenage school kid to get involved in blues music, but for Danny it seemed quite a natural direction, as he explains. "Really what my mum and dad listened to, which wasn't so much the older, deeper blues that I grew towards in the end, it was like Clapton and Rory Gallagher and Hendrix and some Dylan and Bruce Springsteen, I still love all that now. So when I got a guitar that was the sort

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of music I wanted to play, just always seemed to be the most enjoyable if you were gonna be a guitarist."

If you listen to Danny's first album, *WATCHING YOU*, released in 2002 (and re-released last year) you will be amazed at how good a guitarist he was, bearing in mind he was only 22 at the time the album was recorded and had only started to learn guitar seven years previously. "I never had any lessons," he says. "My dad played a little bit before he played bass, he used to play acoustic blues indoors and so he showed me some things but it was really learning off CDs, playing along to CDs and videos and then just copying. Basically you think of it as self-taught but ... I suppose it is different to self-taught for the guitarists that were around years ago when you just had to slow a record down. In my day of learning and obviously I am still learning, there are lots of tools that can help you learn

without actually having a teacher. But then later on Walter Trout became my teacher, so he showed me a lot of things."

Hearing the name Walter Trout tweaked my attention, so how had Danny got to know the great man. "Well, it was about the time I started learning really and it was probably one of the reasons I managed to stick with it, whereas it could have been a flash in the pan. I had a friend at school whose dad was a drummer in a band and they opened for Walter Trout at the Junction in Cambridge. So he had been saying at school: 'My dad is in this band and they are opening for Walter Trout.' I hadn't heard of him so my mum got one of his albums and it just changed my life. My parents took me to see him and I then really got into his music after that concert and started to become serious about the guitar. I wrote him a letter and put a picture with it, and he rang me

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up and said: 'I remember you with your mum and dad at the gig,' because it had reminded him of when his mum and dad used to take him to see shows and things like that. We just became friends and it continued over the years. He is like one of my longest best friends, at the time it was like a hero worship. He is an amazing guy."

It didn't take Danny long to see that his career path was in music. "I got the guitar at fifteen, at eighteen I started messing around with tunes and my dad was on the bass which ended up working out brilliantly, but at the time he just did it for me because there was no young guys who wanted to play blues, now I am so glad we did. We had a drummer who lived just up the road [Andy Burt who left in 2004, Trevor Barr is the band's third drummer and has been with them since 2005] then it all just came together. I was serious and knew after about six months what I was going to do for my living, not because I was any good, but just because I knew I was determined and was so in love with it. By eighteen I had already left school and didn't get any particularly good GCSEs or anything, so I just did some different jobs that allowed me to practice and then we started getting gigs in pubs. I didn't want to ring up and ask to be booked so my mum did it, which is how she became my manager. We started working in pubs and it got more popular and suddenly I was working all the time and didn't need to do the day job anymore, which is what I aimed for, but it just happened sooner than I had planned. Then from there we have just kept trying to expand it out a little bit further all the time."

"The first full year of playing the pubs, I would actually have been twenty in the July of that year, so that would have been 2000, so I was nineteen when I started going at it full-time. We kind of had to get out of just doing the pubs if I wanted to have a career so we started doing the blues clubs where people were paying to get to see you which is much better and a totally different ball-game. The pubs taught me so much, though, because you were playing to people who



didn't always particularly want to hear you, they were just there and didn't even know a band was on, that taught me so much. Then it expanded out to me doing the blues clubs and from there we went to Europe."

JUST AS I AM is Danny's seventh album. "This has been by far the most successful, particularly in Europe, it has been the best selling in advance by a long way. The first four I did for Blues Matters, which was a small English company and then we started doing fairly well in Europe and one day we did a show and the guy got on the microphone at the end of the gig and said: 'Tomorrow night's concert is cancelled' [Jim Suhler who plays guitar with George Thorogood] and the promoter said to me afterwards that on the Sunday he was due to play at a really big festival in Holland and that he could probably get me in his slot, which was the start of everything, because I went and filled in for him and my record company who signed me in Europe were there which led to me getting with the Agency I am with. So I see my career as two separate things, the four albums I did with Blues Matters and then the first album I did for them (Continental Blue Heaven) which was LIVE which is when it picked up in Europe and it has really built a lot from there."

Returning to the new album, Danny explained how it was slightly different in some respects to his previous ones. "The last album, BLACK AND WHITE, we did at the same place that we did this one which was Dave Williams' studio [The Grange, Norfolk]. It is not digital it is all done onto tapes the old fashioned way, which obviously wouldn't work for a pop record, but for a blues record it is superb. So it was the same place to

record, although before it was like me producing it, whereas Dave did it this time, he is amazing, you know incredible. I took more time writing this album, normally I don't really start writing the album until the studio is booked, which is normally four months in advance when I know that I have got some spare time, but I wanted to spend longer on this one so I started writing it around the start of 2009 and we were in there 10th September to start recording. We also did what is called pre-production, where we go to a smaller studio. We went to a studio in Norwich for like five days and that is when I taught the band the songs and we just recorded it and took it away and learnt our parts, so we were more prepared which I think is what might be the difference to this one doing a little bit better."

Finally I asked Danny what comes next? "I am always on the road because that is what I love to do. There are constantly things being booked all over Europe and my next thing will be a DVD, which we have never done. I am aiming to do that next February in Holland, which has become my biggest country and so I should have a really big crowd there. They are great audiences. I did the LIVE album in England and I just think that it is the right place to do it. I know the club I am going to do it in so that is something for the future. It wasn't actually necessarily the country I chose, but the club, it is a big club that holds about 800 to 900 and has a balcony where we can also get camera shots from, you can get a lot of angles so that is really good. It is close to airports and things for anybody who wants to come over, so that is the next thing." **David Knowles**