



WHAT'S IN YOUR KIT BAG?

'For years I used a Taylor 314ce, but now I have a Martin J40 and it's absolutely fantastic. It's a jumbo guitar and it has all the advantages of a big round sound, but it does have a tapered body, which means you can get quite intimate with it. I also have a Martin 000-16 which I used on the album, but I don't take that touring as it's a very old guitar. I also have a baby Martin, a Takamine and an electric Fender which I use when I play live.'

KIT HOLMES

KIT HOLMES IS A SINGER-SONGWRITER AND VIRTUOSO GUITARIST. SHE HAS JUST RELEASED HER THIRD STUDIO ALBUM, *DRIVING INTO THE BLUE*.

How does this new album differ from your previous two?

On this new album we've still got the same band, and we've still got the wonderful Danny Thompson on bass, Pat Illingworth on drums and Allan Greenwood on other guitars. We recorded at home and at a local studio called The Chairworks, and then we took it to Abbey Road to be mastered. All three albums were mastered at Abbey Road, but this

time around we did experiment a little more. The first track, 'Kitty's Blues', was recorded in mono, which is a little bit different than anything we've done before. We were trying to get a more old-fashioned feel to it. Also, we experimented with reverb. Usually you put the reverb on afterwards. You listen to the song and decide what reverb you would like. But we decided we'd record 'Blues For Muse' with the reverb on

it, to give more of a live sound.

I'd like *Driving Into The Blue* to be received well. Obviously it's the third album, so I'm a little bit further down the line. The thing that differs about this one is that it has a little more of an aspect of fun to it. A few of the songs on there, like 'Kinda Girl', 'Roundabout' and 'Arriving At The Station' have a fun, tongue-in-cheek quality to them. So although we follow the same general format

and have the same band, this one's a little lighter in mood.

Do you ever write new songs when playing live, or is it all done in the studio?

When it comes to recording in a studio and playing live, I like and enjoy both, but they are very different. I love the of-the-moment feel of playing live. When you're recording you put a lot of pressure on yourself to get it right, whereas when you're playing live you only get one chance. With recording, you can be quite creative in the studio, which is one thing I really like. You've got the whole day to get one track right,

if you need to, and that's quite nice.

I don't ever write new songs when I'm playing live. I find you're just focused on the gig and the stuff you're going to play. I probably wouldn't write songs in the studio either. It's more of a 'getting up at two o'clock in the morning' kind of thing, when you've got something going around and around in your head. Just when you're on your own, really.

I don't write in one particular way. It depends on what you're doing. You could go and see an exhibition. I've recently been to the Gauguin exhibition and the Bridget Riley exhibition, for instance. Or you could be reading a book like Geoff Dyer's *Jeff In Venice*, which I absolutely love at the moment. Or you could go and see a film like *The Big Lebowski* or *The Godfather*. Anything like that can trigger it.

There's got to be a part of you in your songs, but I like to think of mine as a little bit more universal, rather than autobiographical. When I went to see the Gauguin exhibition it was so awe-inspiring that afterwards you don't know when or how that's going to come out in a song. I think that's the way I work: collecting fragments. Whether that's from reading a book or doing something as banal as going to the supermarket and hearing somebody say something that's either inspirational or completely zany. You might pick that up and use it in some way.

Which song do you most enjoy playing?

The song I've most enjoyed performing live is one called 'No You No Me' from my CD *Catch The Echo*. It's probably one of the most simple songs I do but that's the one I tend to enjoy. It's a sad song but I enjoy playing it, and from the feedback I get, that tends to be the one people like in the live show.

Who are your biggest songwriting influences?

As a songwriter, I'm influenced by the usual suspects. Bob Dylan, of course. I also really like Tom Waits and I could listen to Nina Simone all day. I absolutely love her singing. I've also recently come across a lady called Leanne Carroll, a jazz singer, who is superb.

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How did you get started?

I had guitar lessons as a kid and went up through all the grades, as you do. I took up violin originally, from a very young age, and then one Christmas I got a guitar. I remember working through the entire tutor book that Christmas; my mum and dad never saw me. And that was that, really. From then on, I was up in my bedroom practising for hours on end.

Like anyone, I started small. I was lucky enough to gain the support of John Renbourn, who let me do some support slots for him in the early days. I also did some support slots for The Albion Band. From there I got the chance to support John Etheridge, who's a fantastic guy, and we've been on tour together for six years! Now I'm embarking on a 13-date tour of my own, which is my first proper tour in my own right.

Do you get nervous onstage?

I think I've got past that now. You get a little bit nervous before the gigs. You'd be a little bit strange if you didn't get some nerves and some adrenalin, but I'm more looking forward to it than worrying.

I was talking to someone the other day and I said that when you're up there onstage it's like that's what

it feels like to feel really alive. That might sound over the top, but that's what it really feels like when you're up there playing the guitar, doing the best that you can, and just enjoying the moment. You're never going to have that moment again – not in the same way – ever. Hopefully the audience will go with you and just enjoy the moment. It wouldn't be the same experience without them.

Do you have any advice for aspiring guitarists?

One of the things I would say to aspiring guitarists is to record your tracks as well as you can possibly record them, because that recording will be there forever and it's really important to get the best quality you can do. Although, having said that, I've just done a session for Songs From The Shed [www.songsfromtheshed.com]. On Sunday I went to this guy's house and he's literally got a shed in his garden. You could hear cars in the street going past every 30 seconds or so. The session was completely acoustic and he recorded it with a hand-held camera, and it's getting lots of support from *The Guardian*, and the BBC have done a little feature on it. So although I would advise you to record everything as well as you can,

it does seem that the YouTube lo-fi thing is coming into fashion at the moment.

If you could work with anyone else in the music industry, who would it be?

I will go completely over the top and say I'd have liked to have worked with Jimi Hendrix. A band like Muse would also be fun, or the Arctic Monkeys, or Johnny Cash. 'Hurt' is probably my favourite song of all time. You just put that on your iPod and go for a walk and the world feels like a completely different place. Sad but strangely uplifting at the same time. I'm not very familiar with the original Nine Inch Nails version of the song, but it's interesting that it was actually written by someone else, and that Cash did such a fantastic performance of it that he really made it his own.

How would you describe your own style?

People always say things like 'not easily pigeonholed'. I find that quite funny, because who wants to be pigeonholed? I'd like to think it was a little bit of all the things I listen to, whether that's Bach or the Arctic Monkeys. I guess you could call it folk with a small 'f', with a bit of rock, pop, jazz and blues. On the second-to-last track on the new album there's even a bit of flamenco thrown in for good measure!

What's next for you?

Hopefully there'll be another tour in the autumn, and I'm thinking about bringing out a live album, so we might do some recordings on this current tour. Also there may be an album of instrumental guitar tracks, because I have quite a few guitar tracks that haven't yet been recorded. I'd like to play some more high-profile festivals, like Glastonbury or Celtic Connections. I think I'd really enjoy doing some big festivals. I've done a lot of the smaller art centre-type venues in the UK, and it might be quite nice to go abroad next. I haven't done that yet, so it might be nice to play in Europe.

www.kitholmes.co.uk

Gareth L Powell