

'I miss being on stage. So long as you are there, playing your own stuff and the sound's good... well it's amazing. It's always been about showing off, really. Whether that's doing keepy-uppy for my dad in the garden as a kid, or whatever'

Main Picture: Justin Currie

It bore all the hallmarks of a classic tale of rock'n'roll excess from a wild-living frontman...

Charismatic singer has arrest warrant issued after missing court date. The crime? Forget the usual rock-god pratfalls of drugs, tax evasion or wife beating.

Not from the songwriter as famous for his giant mutton chop sideburns as his meaty back catalogue of hits.

When Justin Currie read in the Daily Record that police wanted to arrest him, he was delighted someone had finally bothered to let him know. "It was fortunate in a way that it was in the news because otherwise I wouldn't have known," says the 42-year-old singer, relaxing with a cup of tea in his Bohemian townhouse in Glasgow's West End.

"I knew I was going to get banned because I had 12 points and I was quite happy to lose my licence."

"The arrest warrant was issued because the original summons was lost in the post – so I never turned up in court because I never knew about the date."

Justin was fined £175 and banned from driving for a year – but, as it turns out, the punishment suits his leisurely lifestyle.

"In actual fact, I'm really enjoying not using my car," he says.

"Someone once said poets should never drive a car so I thought if I'm still attempting to be a lyricist then I should never set foot behind the wheel of my car again."

"Not that I'd claim to be a poet but I think it's a case of the mind never being in the present tense."

"I do feel a lot better for not driving, I have to say."

"There's really something about driving that turns you into a bloke, just a regular very straight man."

"Not an artist, not a rock'n'roll star, just a man. God bless Noel Gallagher – he never got a driving licence, he gets driven everywhere."

"That's total class."

As the man behind classic Del Amitri tracks *Nothing Ever Happens*, *Always The Last To Know*, *Driving With The Brakes On*

I'm always the last

Justin had to read the Record to find

The big interview

Saturday, January 20, 2007

Del Amitri star was banned from driving but it's helped him to focus much more on getting his solo album *Rebound* out

By PAUL ENGLISH

and Kiss This Thing Goodbye, Justin doesn't fit his own definition of a "regular" man.

But as a frequent face in the coffee houses and bars of Glasgow, he's not prone to Gallagher-esque bouts of starchy behaviour either.

So with Del Amitri in cold storage and their lead singer doodling with various ad-hoc musical projects, just what has Justin been doing with his time? "I play five-a-sides – sometimes with the Belle & Sebastian boys – go hillwalking and watch telly like everyone else.

"And I'm a big fan of the pub. But I've never wanted to be a jobbing songwriter. I want to be someone who's sitting watching TV one day and feels something.

"So I suppose I spend most of the time waiting for songs to arrive, rather than deliberately setting out to write them.

"Then I'll write three songs and one of them will end up being the one I was thinking of."

For the aspiring bedroom songwriter, it's a familiar feeling.

But to a man who has played at some of the biggest rock festivals in the world, knocking out a ditty after half an hour of Casualty on a Saturday night was never going to be enough.

It's no surprise then, that Justin Currie has – finally – written a solo album. What is surprising is why it's taken him so long.

"Guys in bands who make solo albums? Well, the records are usually never anywhere near as good as the stuff they do in bands, that's the general rule," he says.



ON HIS OWN... Justin is doing a solo show at Celtic Connections

"You're incredibly lucky if you do an album that's anywhere near as good as what you did in your band.

"And then there's the ego thing about stepping from the shadows to bask in the solo spotlight.

"I never needed to do that because I wrote the majority of the songs in Del Amitri and I was the lead singer, so my ego wasn't really in dire need of stroking.

"All the songs I wrote got released, so there's really no sense of me being frustrated."

That said, Justin has written and recorded *Rebound*, an album of slow songs, scheduled for release before the clocks change.

Several tracks are already available on Justin's Myspace website, where Del's die-hards are twitching over the prospect of their hero's first 'real' project since the release of the *Can You Do Me Good?* LP in 2002.

And tonight the songs will be given their first official airing, when Justin plays his first true solo gig at Glasgow's ABC for the Celtic Connections festival.

"It's an opportunity to do something quite personal," he says.

"But I always hated the idea of guys in bands doing solo records.

"To me you either start out as a solo artist or you don't. I was always a guy who wrote songs to play and sing in a band. I didn't write songs to be a solo troubadour."

Laughing, he adds: "I suppose it's a bit of an ego trip.

"I miss it terribly, I miss being on stage. So long as you are there, playing your own stuff and the sound's good... well it's amazing.

"It's always been about showing off, really. Whether that's doing

keepie-ppy for my dad in the back garden as a kid, or whatever.

"I don't think anyone gets on a stage unless they want attention from mum and dad."

So why the change? "Well, the songs were there and I wanted to release them. That's my only excuse," he says.

"It's not uplifting or commercial. I've done it because I've written these songs and I wanted to make a sad, serious record.

"And I do wonder if it's just total self indulgence.

"I don't really know. There's one particular song on the solo record which is about being a total b****d."

"And it's true. All the people over the years I've treated really shoddily – well, there's no point pretending I haven't. So I might as well be honest about it.

"Hopefully I'll have made a record that can move people.

"Everything on it is about things that have happened, straight from the heart.

"But considering how lucky I've been, well, it would be bullsh*t for me to moan or to write pop songs just to get on the radio.

"My songs have been on the radio for more than a decade, and I've been incredibly lucky for that to happen.

"The last thing I want to turn into is one of those old whingeing

ex-pop stars who try to churn out the kind of songs they wrote in their 20s. I think that's ludicrous.

"If I release this and nobody buys it then it's been a vanity project. But I think I'm entitled to at least one vanity project."

Having appeared with Blazin' Fiddles, Eddi Reader and Colin McIntyre at Celtic Connections in recent years, Justin's no stranger to the world's biggest winter arts festival.

But he wants to get one thing straight – this is no Del Amitri gig. He says: "A solo show is different completely.

"It's not really tailor-made for Celtic Connections.

"It's more just the start of what I want to do for the rest of the year once the record's out."

Justin has a girlfriend – though he doesn't name her – but makes no bones about the fact that he has no intention of starting a family.

The songs which made his name have left fans with an impression of the singer as being, well, not exactly husband material.

Are they right?

"I've known since I was about 15 I never wanted to start a family – and I still feel the same now."

"I used to say to people that there's a total separation between the guy who sings the songs and me the person," he says.

"Folk would say I was this really sensitive guy.

"But I'd have to put them straight – I'm a selfish f****er, a brutal b****d whose entire existence is wrapped up in self expression and getting attention."

Tonight, Justin Currie will enjoy both. And once the lights are up and the attention's gone?

Well, the rejuvenated rocker will likely be walking home...

● Justin Currie plays Glasgow's ABC tonight. *Rebound* will be released in the spring. Justin also appears on Glasgow band Green Poppers' album *Domino Mornings*, out April.

Stepping out from shadows

Justin Currie won't admit to being a part of the obscure Uncle Devil Show, the band which released an album in 2004. So after Del Amitri, *Rebound* is his first 'official' release. We look at the other Scottish solo artists who've stepped out of the shadows of their band...

RICKY ROSS

The Deacon Blue frontman released first solo effort *What You Are* in 1996. Critically well received, the guitar album failed to match Deacon Blue's sales and he was dropped by Sony. With his band reforming sporadically, he's still had time for three other solo albums – *New Recording* (1997), *This Is The Life* (2002) and *Pale Rider* (2005).



DEACON BLUE... Ricky Ross

MARTI PELLOW

When Marti's not selling his soul on dire talent shows for hopeless soap stars, he's still capable of writing songs to melt the heart of Medusa. With Wet Wet Wet back together, Marti's still prone to the odd solo outburst. First offering *Smile* (2001) was followed by a solo interpretation of Wet Wet Wet songs then a covers album *Between The Covers* (2003). Last year he released the impressive *Moonlight Over Memphis*.

RODDY FRAME

Founder of Aztec Camera, – his first solo album *The North Star* was in 1998, followed by the brilliant acoustically driven *Surf*. He followed up in 2006 with *Western Skies*.

RODDY WOOMBLE

The frontman of Idlewild has collaborated with folkies John McCusker, Kate Rusby and Karine Polwart and also released a stripped down selection of solo work on *My Secret is My Silence* in 2006.

EDWYN COLLINS

The Orange Juice frontman had a brain haemorrhage in 2005 but made a recovery. His career has spawned six solo LPs and mega hit *A Girl Like You*.

to know

cops were after him



BANDING TOGETHER... Justin with Del Amitri guitarist Iain Harvey