

s f t w MUSIC
EXTRA

This new album and book is a world you can immerse yourself in

Q & A
NIC CESTER

AS the singer with Aussie rockers Jet, Nic Cester lived the rock 'n' roll life-style to the full.

Now a father and living in Milan, he is focusing on solo musical projects.

The Skipping Girl is both a children's book and an album of melodic and hauntingly melancholic songs. He talks to **JACQUI SWIFT**.

HOW was lockdown?

It was OK for us. I live in Milan with my wife and daughter. Milan was one of the first cities in the world to be hit with Covid so it unfolded here for us in real time and as a result there wasn't the same anxiety of impending doom that I noticed in other countries. It also gave me the chance to develop more of a relationship with my daughter, who was one and a half at the time.

It's rare albums are accompanied by children's books...

I was looking for an interesting way to present an album. The story was already part of the overall concept and in some of the lyrics, so I thought why not go all the way? Create an entire world and try to enhance the communication to make it as rich as possible.

What was the inspiration for the book?

It is based on a neon sign in my hometown of Melbourne, Australia. It's a girl in a red dress skipping and has been a part of the skyline since 1936. Originally, she stood atop an old factory where vinegar was made and bottled. The company chose her because of an old English skipping game where girls would skip, singing "salt, vinegar, mustard, pepper, if I dare, I can do better".

It's beautiful but also melancholic because she's trapped in this repetitive loop that never goes anywhere. It occurred to me that seeing her as a metaphor might be an interesting subject.

What does your daughter Mathilda think of the album?

She loves it. She says that it's "our" story and that she is the skipping girl.

Tell us about working with the Ennio Morricone Orchestra.

The orchestra is based in Rome and was an pleasure to work with. It was just after the hard lockdown ended in Milan so it felt like the world had gone from black and white back to technicolour being in this amazing studio. It hadn't been possible to leave my neighbourhood for months and months, then suddenly I was in Rome with an orchestra in (film composer) Ennio Morricone's studio, going to restaurants. Amazing.

Who inspired you while you were writing the album?

I think more moods than specific artists. Like the mood of Chopin's nocturnes or Erik Satie's Gnossienne. I listen to a lot of classical music and crooners like Dean Martin, Bobby Darin, Bing Crosby. It's all very autumnal. You could say the whole project is a deep dive into nostalgia, melancholy and wonderment.

Now you're a family man, do you miss touring with Jet?

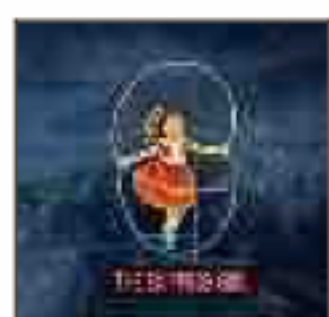
Not at all, to be honest. I did more than three lifetimes' worth of touring with that band. I'm more interested in new experiences than reliving old ones.

How was it singing with the Jaded Hearts Club (supergroup featuring Matt Bellamy and Graham Coxon who perform Beatles covers)?

Great fun. I love playing music without any agenda. Pure fun. Obviously, everyone involved is incredibly talented too, so it's also quick and easy.

What's next for you?

I had another solo album finished before I started Skipping Girl. I will release that next year but not before going back to Australia, now it is possible. It's been almost three years now and we're heading back for Christmas.



NIC CESTER
The Skipping Girl

★★★★

Picture: CHIARA FOSSATTI/SUPLIED

NEW MUSIC

By
JIM GELLATLY

VLURE

WHERE: Glasgow

WHO: Hamish Hutcheson (vocals), Conor Goldie (guitar), Niall Goldie (bass), Alex Pearson (keyboards), Carlo Kriekaard (drums)

FOR FANS OF: Idles, The Prodigy, The Amazing Snakeheads

JIM SAYS: During their incendiary set at TRNSMT I was struggling to place the roots of VLURE's sound. With an incredible cover of the Faithless anthem *God Is A DJ* it all clicked into place. "Goth-trance" was a term I'd seen referenced, and it suddenly made sense.

Recalling bands from my youth such as Joy Division, The Cure and Bauhaus, the soaring synth and beats take it to a new level.

VLURE grab their wide influences to create something fresh and invigorating. The best new band in Scotland may be edgy and dangerous, but their music is just as powerful.

Niall told me: "I think we all carry a certain intensity in our personalities and day to day lives. Hamish doesn't walk down Buchanan Street topless and beating his chest though!"

Industrial rock is at the core with brothers Conor and Niall adding that dimension. Niall added: "Conor and I are really influenced by industrial and electronic music. My obsession with Nine Inch Nails knows no bounds. It'll be a pretty predictable Spotify Wrapped for me this Year."

In Hamish they've unearthed one



of the best frontmen around. Conor and Niall's mum can be thanked for the introduction. Niall said: "He was scouted to be our singer by our mum. She'd seen him play with his old band at a gig and told us we had to have him play for us. We're lucky he said yes."

I love how VLURE have gone about things. Before Covid they'd started to make their mark on the live scene with some now legendary shows including a 2019 Creative Scotland showcase at the Great Escape festival in Brighton.

Until this year the only recorded output was a stunning live video of their track *Desire*, eventually emerging in March as the B-side to their debut single *Shattered Faith*.

Acclaim continued to grow with BBC Radio 1's Jack Saunders among their biggest supporters. He hailed them as "a band sent to alter the very fabric of the scene".

With debut EP *Euphoria* set for release in January, the band have already teased it by unleashing the tracks *Show Me How To Live Again*, *Heartbeat* and new single *I Won't Run (From Love)*.

Hamish said: "I think you can expect a little bit of each of us. It's a record we're really proud of and showcases what we can do as a band and our musical versatility."

Currently rounding off a UK tour, VLURE, play their final show of the year at King Tut's in Glasgow on December 19. Following the EP release, they hit the road with *White Lies* in March.

MORE: facebook.com/vlure.gla
Jim presents a weekly showcase of New Music on Amazing Radio Sundays 2-4pm. See [amazingradio.com](https://www.amazingradio.com) and [jimgellatly.com](https://www.jimgellatly.com)

BOOKS


Edited by
NATASHA HARDING

sftw
MEETS
PAULA HAWKINS



CRIME SEEN
... Emily Blunt in *The Girl On The Train* movie, inset, Paula

'I want to explore new territory and surprise myself'

WHEN Paula Hawkins wrote *The Girl On The Train*, she had no idea it would become a phenomenon.

By NATASHA HARDING

It has sold 23million copies since it was published in 2015 and was made into a film starring Emily Blunt.

Paula's latest novel *A Slow Fire Burning* is set on and around the canals of North London.

The 49-year-old, who splits her time between Edinburgh and London, says: "It centres on three very different, intriguing women who have all suffered tragedies or traumas in their past."

"The book asks the question: How far would you go if you had the chance to right some terrible wrong done to you? What would you be prepared to sacrifice?"

"For me, the key to writing a truly captivating novel is character. It's the part I spend most time on. In some cases, I'll have been thinking about a character for years before I write them."

Six years ago Paula was writing under the pen name Amy Silver, releasing a series of romcoms called *Confessions Of A Reluctant Recessionista*.

The final book in the selection did not sell well, so Paula took stock before writing *The Girl On The Train* under her own name.

The dark bestseller centres on a woman in her thirties who thinks she has witnessed a crime while travelling by rail. It was an immediate hit.

Paula says: "I am much more comfortable writing

tragedy than comedy. Darker stories fascinate me. I like to make my characters suffer!"

Some readers were angry at the film's switch of location from London to New York, and at characters being made more glamorous.

But Paula insists: "I liked it. I understand why readers were upset about the changes in the adaptation but I thought the director stayed true to the darkness at the heart of the book."

Her follow-up, 2017's *Into The Water*, was a murder mystery set in Northumberland. Paula says: "I don't think it's possible to write a good novel, or enjoy writing, if you are following a formula."

"I want to surprise myself when I write. I want to explore new territory. Following a set of rules would make writing very dull."

"I'm obviously more financially comfortable now but the most important change has been to my working life. I have the luxury of writing fiction full-time."

"I've been invited to speak at festivals all over the world, I've met writers I admire, I've been asked to judge prizes. It's been a great privilege."

"I can safely say I am unlikely ever again to have the kind of sales I had with *The Girl On The Train*. It is too high a bar to aim for, which takes the pressure off."

"I'm not thinking about how that book performed when I write. I'm thinking about the characters in the new work, about their stories and how best to tell them."

● *A Slow Fire Burning* is out now.


GAMES
Edited by STUART CULLEN

MICROSOFT recently celebrated two HUGE milestones recently — the first being the Xbox turning 20 years old and the second, Halo's twentieth.

To mark the latter, they sneakily launched the Multiplayer side of Halo Infinite a few weeks before the campaign is due to land.

It's been six years since the last instalment of the hugely-loved series, so to say hopes are high is an understatement.

Halo Infinite Multiplayer

Xbox Series X/S, Xbox One and PC FREE

ment. It's early doors but this free-to-play spin of the franchise is good, really good in fact, but does need a bit of work behind the scenes to be truly great.

The gunplay is super-tight and has a classic vibe to it but with a modern twists thanks to new weapons. Maps ranging from tight battles on futuristic

city streets to all-out war on far-off planets not only embrace the series' past but also hint at its future.

You have the option of ranked and unranked in 4v4 games or all-out big team fire-fights but no doubt more modes will be added in time.

But there needs to be an

option in-game to switch off cross-play and the battle pass system isn't great at respecting your time and this was reinforced with the Fracture: Tenrai event.

2021 was one hell of a year of FPS fans with Call of Duty, Battlefield and Halo all rejoining the fray. With Halo, it's safe to say the king has returned.

★★★★

