

# BiTS INTERVIEW: Starlite Campbell

Starlite Campbell Band is a British blues group based between Manchester and Portugal. Formed in 2016, the band is led by married couple Suzy Starlite and Simon Campbell. Their debut album, "Blueberry Pie" was nominated for a European Blues Award in November 2017 and blends British blues, British rock, blues and British folk. their second British blues / British rock music album, "The Language of Curiosity" is set for release on November 5 2021.

BiTS: First of all, I just want to say congratulations on the new album which, as you know, I think is absolutely terrific. Did you have a hard job making it in lockdown?



Suzy Starlite and Simon Campbell

SC: It's been very tricky to get the musicians out because we do everything live and that's our big thing. We do everything analogue. We try and work together as much as possible. We did some overdubs at Rockfield which is in Wales, with Jonny Henderson, the keyboard player, when we were over in the UK in January 2020 before it all kicked off. But to try to get Steve over to work with Suzy, it's been very difficult. It's been a protracted process, but we're pleased with the result.

BiTS: Suzy, you started off some time ago when I last spoke to you as being, I remember, a rather apprehensive bass player. You seem to have done a tremendous amount of practice and improved enormously since then. Is that the way you feel?

SS: [Chuckling] I don't know what's happening, I just so love playing bass and all your inhibitions go and as I've learned more and the music just romances me and I can't stop. I just love it. I feel much more connected, like it's a part of me now. Even though I felt that before, it feels more established, more mature now.

BiTS: Tell me about the songs. Do you have a favourite? Nobody ever wants to select a favourite. They say they're all my babies, but is there a favourite that you have on the album?

SC: I think the whole thing about favourites is very difficult. I think depending on when you listen to it, if you really, really, really had to push me, I think 'Take Time To Grow Old' is probably the song, because we started that way back when we were at a studio in Valencia and we did a very basic track there and it's been in a pot for a while.

It was right after we recorded "Blueberry Pie" and of course, this was our next album, so it was going to always go on the next album. I think our song writing has matured a lot and I think the overall sound to it, and I was very pleased also with the fact that we have top musicians in the

band, where we've got a harp player and piano and guitar bass, and drums with the big vocals. It's quite an interesting thing with the 12-string. Right now, as of this second, it's my favourite.

SS: [Laughing] I was just trying to think if I have a favourite. You're right, actually and it all depends on what flavour - if you fancy chocolate one day or vanilla ice cream. It's the same with the music in terms of what you love. I do love 'Lay It Out On Me' because I think it was a very great decision to actually leave it so bare and when we play it live, it's got a certain mystical magic to it because when we play it live - we played it at "Flirting with Blues" festival in the Netherlands, and it was so naked and so beautiful. It was a broken beauty that it just took you, and it almost melts you as you play it and I really love the way that that song, the sentiment and the feel.

BiTS: The album is released on, I think, is it the 5<sup>th</sup> of November ?

SS: Yes, November 5<sup>th</sup>.

BiTS: What are your plans to go out and market it? Presumably, you've got to go and gig somewhere, are you?

SC: That's right. We're off on tour. We're in Portugal right now in our studio, so we're driving on Sunday back to the UK. We've got our carnet here, which is the document that you now need to get all our equipment into the UK following Brexit. All that's sorted out. We're kicking off our tour on the 1<sup>st</sup> of October as a small duo, stripped back thing in Lancashire and then if you look on our website, which is <https://starlite-campbell.com/gigs>, you'll see all the gigs in there. I can't remember, is there seven or eight gigs and then we're off to the Netherlands and Germany and then the Czech Republic for a week.

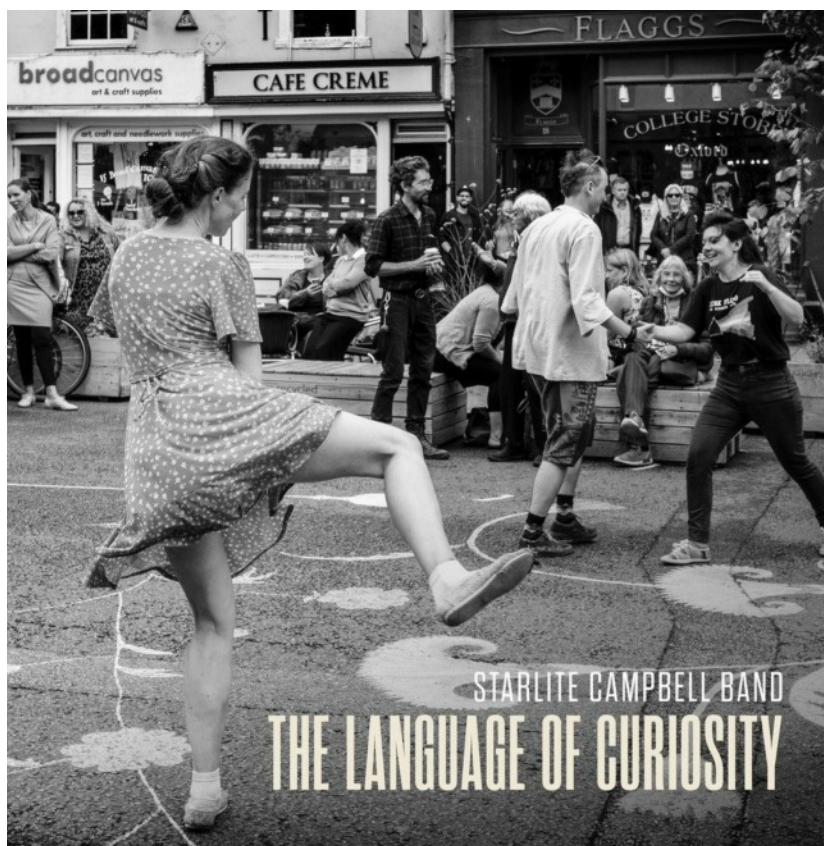
BiTS: Actually, I remember seeing your post online about all the paperwork that you have to do. You seem to have got it pretty well under control, Simon.

SC: Well, I think under control is a bit hopeful. We'll see when we have to get the other side of the border

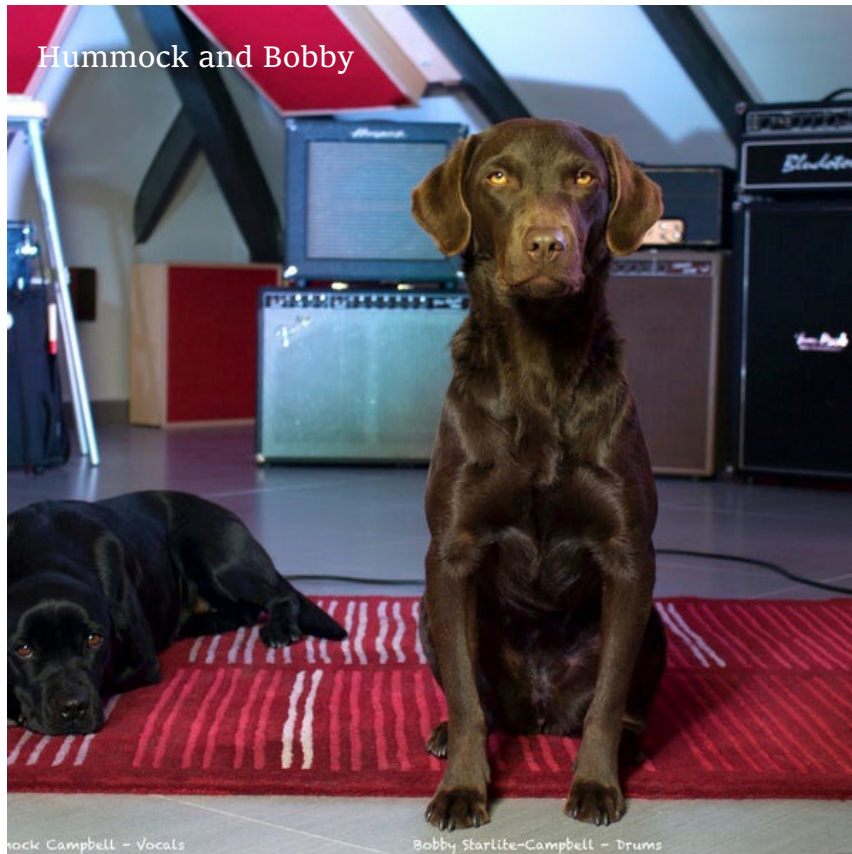
SS: Yes, we'll let you know [laughing].

SC: We'll tell you whether we've got it under control. I know that a lot of British artists and European artists, for that matter, have really struggled with this and we just took the bull by the horns in a very Portuguese way and [chuckles] wrestled with it to the ground because the thing in our relationship is tied up in the music, because we're both musical partners and we write together and everything, but I attempt to deal with all that side of stuff and Suzy does all the marketing type stuff, so between us, we've got a good balance. I managed to focus on it while Suzy was busy getting gigs and marketing.

BiTS: I gather from what I've read about you that you travel with two dogs. Are you still doing that?



SS: [Laughs] Yes. We've got two Labradors, our studio hounds. There's Hummock, who's 11 and Bobbie, they're sisters, she's nine and we all travel out in the van of rock. We're a proper family and they're an absolute joy and an integral part of our life and in fact, what's really beautiful is when we're recording, Hummock, she sometimes hides in the studio and when someone's playing a



solo, all we can hear is this awooo, and she sings and that's when we know where she is.

SC: She's black and it's difficult to see her until she smiles and that's when you see those teeth, but it's veacousticry funny.

SS: She just loves the whole thing. Bobbie just sleeps under the console. We really are a total musical family.

BiTS: Suzy, you're a bit of a traveller, maybe even a nomad. I noticed your "On Walden Pond" quote, which I haven't seen anybody use for a long time. Why are you a fan of that book? Are you a wanderer? The quote from On Walden Pond, the Henry Thoreau piece that you've got on your web site bio

SS: Yes, I'm a huge fan of the "Dead Poets Society" and that quote actually came from that movie and that's how I found out about it because they used to open up the Dead Poets meeting with that quote. "I went to the woods because I wanted to live deliberately. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived". And even from a teenager, I know it in my heart and it's true and it's got me into trouble but in a good way because I take chances and I try things that I just would never have tried before just because I feel that life's about adventure, discovery. But the people are the key because you can sit on top of a beautiful mountain or have this most beautiful view in front of you, but I really love to share that. I think it's perfect when you share it and that's where the live music comes in when we can get everyone together in a room and share. That's when it really takes hold for me.

BiTS: That's wonderful. Simon, on the album, you've done obviously a huge amount of work in the studio, mastering it and doing all the things that you do in the studio. How long do you think you spent getting the tracks up to standard?

SC: Well, the thing is I think the joy is working with this particular group of musicians, me not included incidentally, it's really quick to get the stuff there because Steve, Jonny, Gabriele, all the people that we work with and Suzy, are super quick at getting stuff down, so the actual track itself is very quickly recorded and I don't really do a lot of messing around with the tracks. The time is taken really by getting people over. In reality, we could have done the album from start to finish with all things plain sailing; we had a load of material written at one time, we probably could have done it in two weeks. But there are some things I do work late on something like 'Said So', for example. That's quite complicated in the middle because there's a lot of stuff going on and the panning and all that carry on, but I'm pretty quick and because we don't mix electronically - we mix



everything on the actual physical console - once you've mixed it that's it. You can't just go back and tweak it the day after because you've reset the console for another track, so you've got to do it then and there. That immediacy really gives you a real sense of urgency, if you like.

BiTS: I said in the review that I did that it reminded me of early Cream stuff before they became famous. Was that the kind of sound that you were aiming for, or am I mistaken?

SC: I think the thing is that early Cream stuff, it was very alive. You could hear it was done on the fly and that's what we've tried to do. My recording experience started in the 70s when I was



playing session guitar in Manchester, and I used to hang around the studios and learn from people. In 1977, it was only ten years since "Sgt. Pepper", so all these people that I was meeting, they remember those old school techniques, so I learned everything from that, and I think that is still with me now because I think our sound is very honest. It's not over processed. It's not over-compressed. It's very open and honest and that's what we try to do. Rather like the Cream stuff, so I think you're right, definitely. It's definitely got that late 60s early 70s vibe there.

BiTS: Tell me what your long-term plans are. Clearly, you can't think of anything beyond the dropping of this particular record, but have you got any plans to do something in the future, another album or something like that?

SS: We've already got two more albums already nearly finished, actually. I tell you what it is because we love writing songs and then the songs decide what genre it is because we don't really have genres. We write songs and then we'll put them into different projects. We've got an acoustic stripped back, more contemporary songwriter album called "The Coat". We've had a few songs on and off now for a couple of years which we're going to be releasing sometime later next year. Because we also tour acoustically and as a duo and sometimes as a trio and we love taking the songs from different places and different feels and then we've got another album. We've written half. We've got one track that's called 'Hello' and it's 28 minutes long and it's more of a progressive, experimental thing. I'm thinking about flavours, if you were going to describe the meal.

SC: Yes, it's definitely more like early 70s. I wouldn't say it's prog completely, but it's definitely more Pink Floyd and that type of thing rather than pure straight up blues, but of course, originally that's where we really feel it, so everything that we do is to the blues concept, isn't it now.

SS: Yes, like the heartbeat of all our writing is blues.

BiTS: Tell me, just to side-track for just one moment, where do these fabulous pictures that you get come from, like the ones that you had of your grandmother and the ones that you're using to promote the current album?

SS: Well, funnily enough with "Blueberry Pie", the title track is about the world's changed so much but what never changes is the taste of your grandma's blueberry pie and if you think about it you can travel anywhere, but then you go home, you have a cup of tea and then would you like some pie? Or have Sunday lunch or something. I'd done a school project where I was learning to use SLR camera and we had a dark room and I was learning how to develop from that, I'd actually taken a photograph inadvertently of my grandmother, Betty. Nanna, we used to call her, and I just thought, oh my goodness, I've still got that negative. So we searched through treasure boxes and found it.



Got it scanned in and it was perfect. I'd

taken that as a school project, so it was very much a personal thing which I think songs and stories are personal, are about real people and then coming onto the 'Language of Curiosity', we have a really good friend called Stuart Bebb, who's a fantastic photographer and his company is Oxford Camera and he took the cover image of the dancing in the street in Oxford.

SC: Right at the end of the lockdown, that's what's significant about it. Lockdown had just finished, and people were out dancing in the street, and we wanted to capture that joy and it's an unusual photograph, but I think he really captured this thing and it's a moment, rather like our songs are a moment in time.

BiTS: Yes. Absolutely fabulous stuff. I won't take much more of your time. Let me ask you one more question. You two clearly are very close indeed. How do you go about doing a song? Do you write it separately and then come together or do you sit in the same room and work it out as you're going along?

SC: Well, there's two ways. Sometimes we write things completely separately and we'll come up with a song and then any critiques from each other that we get on it, we modify. But sometimes we write completely together, so it all depends really. There's no fixed method. I'll come up with a melody. Suzy will come up with some lyrics and sometimes it works like that. Other times we do the whole thing completely ourselves individually, and so it varies.

SS: And when it comes to singing the song, we just ask who needs to sing it? Not I want to sing it. We try and keep ourselves out of the process and just try and serve what the song needs all the time, and it actually makes a better way of writing as well if you're just focusing on that.

BiTS: Yes, I can see that. Thank you very much indeed for talking to me. It was great. Have a wonderful tour.

SC: Okay, Ian. Thank you.

SS: Thank you for all your support, though, and really you've been there with us from the off and we really do value you, so thank you.

BiTS: That's very kind of you. Thank you very much indeed. You stay safe, you two and we'll speak again at some time in the future.

SC: Thanks Ian, Cheers. Have a great day.

SS: Bye.

BiTS: Bye then. Bye.

