

# ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND

## Starlite Campbell Band

The Language Of Curiosity

Image © Sandra Ventura



*We've travelled and had more stories to write with what's happened and we've grown as artists as well..*

“Curiouser and curiouser!” cried Alice in the second chapter of Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures In Wonderland*, written in 1865. It’s a musing that Graham Munn could well have uttered ahead of his interview with Suzy and Simon of the Starlite Campbell Band, as he chats to them about their stonking new album *The Language Of Curiosity*. Five years ago Graham Munn spoke to them about their then-released *Blueberry Pie* album. Since then there’s been Brexit and Covid... goodness, how time flies! Graham Munn catches up with the dynamic duo.

**When we last spoke you were in Valencia and planning to move to the Isle Of Man, but you went to Germany and now you’re in Portugal. What’s been going on?**

**Simon:** We had everything in storage and then we found the Isle Of Man was too expensive to rent anything, so we moved to Germany just as Brexit was looming. We unpacked the studio, started work and did a few gigs and then the pandemic hit. Fortunately, two weeks before leaving, we went down to Rockfield studios and Johnny Henderson, who was on the first album, joined us for a day. We worked him for about twelve hours in the studio and recorded all the piano and organ parts for the *Language of Curiosity* tracks we had ready. We then recorded some extra tracks, one being ‘Can’t Find My Way Home’, a single that’s not on the album. We were very fortunate - we played at The Half Moon in Putney with Josh Phillips (Procol Harum) on keyboards, then Greystones in Sheffield. Then we went back to Germany.

**Suzy:** We’d started one song, ‘Take Time To Grow Old’, while we were still in Valencia and that’s when the concept for *Language Of Curiosity* came into being. So the concept was started in Valencia, but also I think being in Germany has formed some of the songs on the album. We wrote some more when we moved to Portugal. It’s actually up to date because obviously we had to delay the release, but in doing so we’ve made the best of it and I think it’s a better album for it. We’ve travelled and had more stories to write about in terms of what’s happened and we’ve grown as artists as well.

I’m interested in the way you’re releasing the album, firing out a

number of singles over an extended period. Has that strategy worked for you, keeping you connected to your audience and fan base?

**Simon:** We were supposed to release the album last October, so we put a single out in March –

**Suzy:** - then another in July, with ‘Lay It Out On Me’, before the full release. We couldn’t tour, so we cancelled everything, having talked with other music industry professionals. It seemed weird: the whole point is to connect the music to people, the music does the matchmaking. After we’ve made the music, it’s up to you to choose whether or not you listen. Then it’s nothing to do with us, because it’s your relationship with the music. The two singles were just the leader and I think that’s kind of normal.

**Simon:** I think you’ve got to keep in the public eye. And the only way to do that is either do lots of videos on YouTube, but we’re not that sort of band, or put singles out and that’s important for us, backing it up with PR, ready for the album, because it’s the physical release that you sell at gigs. That’s where really, in these days of streaming, you make money. You’ve got to actually to earn a living in this.

It’s touring the album physically that matters. That’s where your income’s going to come from -

**Simon:** Absolutely, along with the sales of t-shirts and hoodies and such. It’s very important, critical to the whole thing. The past eighteen months has been exceptionally difficult in terms of income. We’ve been successful with our pre-order campaign and with crowdfunding and our family has been remarkably supportive financially, it’s been absolutely

incredible, because they believe in what we do and there have been times when we really needed that. We've always come up with the goods, which is amazing and also because we have the studio. Of course we haven't been able to have anybody in the studio, but I can still produce and mix.

**That's the one thing about digital technologies, mobility and flexibility. I still prefer the warmth and sound of vinyl as a choice, fortunately now having a revival -**

**Simon:** I mix like it used to be mixed. If you listen to an early Faces or Led Zeppelin record, there's not an awful lot of bass, simply because you can't put that much bass on vinyl, the needle physically jumps off the record. So when you listen to our records, they sound quite bright sometimes and very open because they're mixed like they used to do in the seventies. That's when I learned my trade.

**Going back to the album and its reflection on life, 'Distant Land' is about the movement of people, mass migration. What triggered that song for you?**

**Simon:** In terms of song writing, we both write, sometimes together, sometimes individually. I ended up singing Suzy's lyrics, which are always troublesome and she ends up singing mine, which are equally as troublesome, but this one, I actually did the lyric and it was one of those things that I just did virtually in a one-off. I wrote the whole thing in five minutes, but the actual melody and the chorus was done on the Isle Of Man. It was particularly windy and wet, it was one of those very tempestuous days. I was listening and reading about the whole situation and watching the news, it just got to me. The lyric came when we were in Germany, because of course Angela Merkel allowed many refugees into Germany and got an awful lot of flak for it, but I thought that was a tremendous act of humanity. That's where it's come from, calling out to governments around the world really to do a similar thing.

**'Lay It Out On Me' feels moody and deep. Suzy's bass really shows through underneath, it's distinctive. There's a sort of darkness to it. Really, I just love that track!**

**Simon:** It's a straight up minor blues, but being curious we wanted to try and take it a little bit away from the norm because now, when I hear a blues, it sounds very American, Chicago or different sounds of America. I know the blues came from there, but I've tried to transport us back to the mid-60s, where the British musicians listened to the blues and their interpretation. So that track screams out for the Hammond organ, but I decided not to put one on, it would have been too obvious. And I thought that the piano that Johnny did was beautiful. It was recorded on a Bosendorfer in Rockfield studios. I wanted him to play hardly anything, to be absolutely bare. It gives the track openness and a little bit of desolation.

**Then there's 'Said So' which I also like. It's completely nuts! It's sort of all over craziness with a lot of interesting sound samples layered in there. Where did it come from?**

**Simon:** The whole track, the lyric, is about opioid addiction, opium and crack cocaine, that whole drug culture and how sad it is. It's sort of our take on that side of it, the middle section is trying to take people on this trip, starting quite calmly with that harmony guitar, like there's nothing going on, then all of a sudden it kicks in.

**Suzy:** My mum got early onset Alzheimer's but the one gift that we had was music. She would not speak for weeks but if you sang, she would sing, so we used to have these little singing sessions. My sister had a little tape recorder and she was doing a little song one day and just burst out laughing. It was beautiful because my grandmother was on the front cover of *Blueberry Pie* and now mum's in that vortex of memories. So it's like when you've got dreams and all that kind of consumerism, everything is in there. At the end, there's the signal. In Germany we lived next door to a fire station and every month at eleven o'clock on

a Saturday morning, you'd hear this massive siren. I went outside and recorded it and we put that in as well. It had become part of our life.

**Overall, I can hear bits of the Stones, The Kinks and a bit of Bowie in the vocals. It's just the vocal feel from that middle stretch title track, 'Language Of Curiosity', where the vocals drop down to that Bowie sound of the seventies. Is that fair?**

**Simon:** I think that's very fair. The funny thing is, we've always loved Bowie and I'm a huge fan of Mick Ronson, Tony Visconti as well when he was doing the three Berlin albums, *Low*, *Heroes* and *Lodger*. He was listening to Scott Walker and Scott was listening to Jacques Brel. So, you know, we listened to an awful lot of Johnny Mercer and Scott Walker stuff. I think it's the Scott Walker thing, which then sounds like Bowie.

**What are your future plans? You've obviously got more music on the go and you've done a parallel album as well in a different genre altogether, I believe?**

**Suzy:** Yeah. We've got an acoustic album called *The Coat*, which we've near enough written. We do tour as a duo, which is something we really enjoy because it strips the songs right back to their bare bones. You go back to the real art of the craft, that's where the song starts. And I love that, especially with the folk background, where I started. So I'm comfortable with that. I think now we've developed it - so we can have keyboards, we've got a cahon that I play sometimes with a jump pedal, just to give it a bit more groove.

**Simon:** The thing with us is that we're songwriters and we come up with stuff in different genres and what we do is give the song what it needs, rather than just a blues or rock treatment or whatever. You've probably heard that from this album and the fact that it's quite varied with bits of almost Spanish. You know, in 'Bad Sign' that little bit of Iberian influenced solo crops up? I think that's where we come from. We're not tied into a genre. We're doing all this stuff that's really just a little bit different, and hopefully our supporters get it. We see a lot of our supporters. They're actually a very broad church of people.

Graham Munn  
starlite-campbell.com

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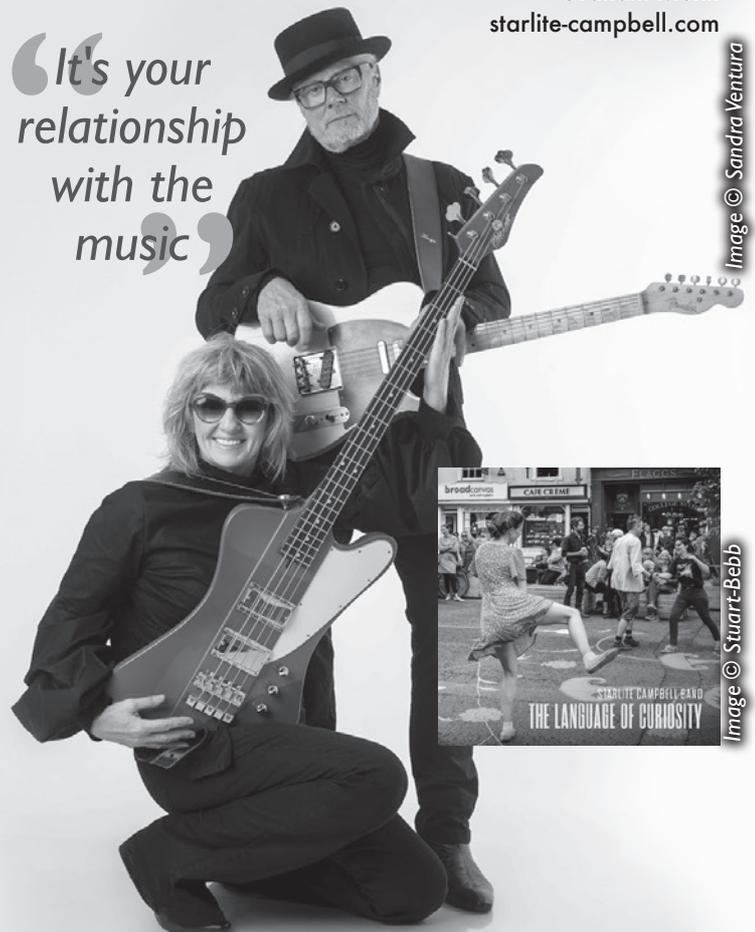


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