

# Alison Burns's biography

There are singers and there are jazz singers. There are jazz singers and there are a few artists who bring more to the microphone - their life, love, heartaches and joy. Alison Burns is one of those artists.

A lifelong love of music started at home, with an early education in the Great American Songbook from a father who played guitar and a mother who would carry the guitar case into his gigs!

As a young girl in Dundee, an industrial city on the east coast of Scotland, the dreams were of singing and acting in Hollywood and the soundtrack was Peggy Lee, Lena Horne, and Bessie Smith among many others.

The road to a recording career has been an inspiring one. From being the first female apprentice engineer in the famous Timex watch factory at the age of 16 (complete with curls and a full face of make up!) to being sacked from a bingo calling job, to the tragic circumstances which encouraged her to make a leap of faith into performing from a secure but unsatisfying job.

The death of her brother Alan, who was serving in the Falklands brought home the reality of a life lived unfulfilled.

While acting, singing and presenting, her band The Rainmates were offered two record deals but the time didn't feel right. Her heart took her back to the songs of the 1940s and the close harmony groups such as The Dinning Sisters.

This led to the formation of a three-part female harmony group, The Penny Dainties. Not only did the Penny Dainties record an album, but it led to Alison meeting her now husband who substituted one night when the regular drummer was unavailable.

During this time Alison was twiddling her thumbs during the day so decided to do what anyone would – to study for a law degree! A short time practising was enough to send Alison back to music full-time, however. After working behind the scenes for a while, it was finally time to get behind the microphone and sing the songs that had been the soundtrack to her life.

Her debut album, *Kissing Bug*, released in March 2007 was received with universal acclaim and became the first album by a Scottish jazz singer to reach the Jazz Top 10.

So far she has packed her bag to perform in far-flung destinations such as Tokyo, Nashville, New York, Cannes, Italy and Shanghai as well as being invited to play by Michael Parkinson, who welcomed her off stage with a huge hug and the comment “wonderful, wonderful!”.

She has played jazz festival and venues across the country, with her own group and guesting with Martin Taylor at a number of concerts.

It was at these concerts that the idea for the new album *1:AM* came about. The recordings of Ella Fitzgerald and Joe Pass were the inspiration, stripping back the songs to just vocal and guitar.

Despite the smoky dark eyes and robust sense of humour, there's little of the jazz diva about Alison Burns. For those who may think that Alison is where she has always wanted to be, that's true up to a point, but looking at her track record, this is obviously just the beginning.

## 1:AM Song by Song

*1:AM* is inspired by the recordings of Ella Fitzgerald and Joe Pass. On the album, produced by Tony Platt, Alison Burns and Martin Taylor capture the essence of the recordings with just voice and guitar.

## Alison takes us through each track.

Again - A hit song recorded by many artists, but my favourite version is by Doris Day who recorded the song in 1949.

Because of You – This is a song from the film I Was An American Spy, and the first of many hits for Tony Bennett. I chose this song because it is such a simple but emotional lyric – it goes straight to what needs to be said.

He's A Tramp – I just love this song and the fact that Peggy Lee co-wrote it. It has always been one of those songs that takes you back to your Walt Disney childhood!

Sophisticated Lady – This is a great jazz standard music written by Ellington with lyrics added later! Sarah Vaughan was the inspiration for this. I just love the fact that the first line is “Smoking, drinking – never thinking of tomorrow” and there are not many songs that have the word “nonchalant” in them!

The Man That Got Away – I love this song! I first heard Judy Garland singing this when I was a very young girl.

Do You Love Me? – I was introduced to this song on a recording by The Dinning Sisters. In March 2000, I had the good fortune to have met Ginger Dinning and as a tribute to her and those lovely vocals I wanted to dedicate this track to her! A true star.

I Haven't Got Anything Better To Do – Martin and I thought we could do a very simple version of this. Other recordings have been much more orchestrated.

Drop Me A Line – A wee gem of a song. Nobody really knows about it – that's why I chose it! Again, I found it in my Dinning Sisters collection and the sweet vocals just sold it to me.

True – The music was written by Martin Taylor about six years ago. He played it to me a little later and said “I don't have a title for it and I think it would work with lyrics too”. He asked if I could write a lyric. It is such an emotional tune that I immediately thought of my brother Alan, who died in the Falklands conflict. I suggested the title True as this was the thread of the lyric. It sat untouched for a while and in the meantime a few well-known artists, including Dolly Parton, expressed an interest in writing a lyric. However, when we spoke about recording 1:AM that I suggested that we record True. I went back to my notes and finished the lyric – very much with Alan in mind.

How Long Has This Been Going On? – I used to sing this at my drill when I was an engineer and all the other apprentices used to throw scraps of metal at me! They had no idea what jazz was and all thought I was weird, knocking out an old-fashioned tune as well as a few component from the workshop.

If I Keep My Heart Out of Sight – This is a James Taylor song. I have played this track to a few unsuspecting listeners and they have assumed that it is a song from the 1940s. A song standing the test of time is wonderful, but if a song can somehow go back in time, that shows how classic songwriting can be completely timeless.

If It's Magic – A Stevie Wonder song, originally recorded with vocals and harp with harmonica at the end. We have also produced a radio edit of this track. I suppose if Ella and Joe were to record a contemporary song today it might be something like this.

No One Ever Tells You – I first heard a Frank Sinatra version of this song and loved the bluesy feel.

I'm Confessin' – I'm a big fan of Peggy Lee and when I heard her version of this song I thought it would work out with guitar and vocals.

### **Traffic Island Discs. Well it's a start...**

Everything Must Go: Steely Dan

I love to go out running with this album loud in my lugs. It has such a feel good factor. The song Everything Must Go is a great song about business going under!

The Man That Got Away: Judy Garland

One of the greatest songs about heartbreak and love. I've always been dumpee, never the dumper, so I can invest some emotion in that song!

Amapola: Ennio Morricone

This is from the soundtrack of Once Upon A Time In America and it's the music that I walked down the aisle to in Italy. The word means Poppy.

Alfie: Matt Monroe

A song that I would like to record this sometime soon. I think we need to erase the Cilla version, so Matt is coming on to the island with me!

Charade: Matt Monroe

More Matt. I love his voice, it's pure silk - and the string arrangements are wonderful.

I Get Along Without You Very Well: Frank Sinatra

It's one of those songs that make you realise that you can't ever be an island!

All Is Fair in Love: Stevie Wonder

In pain? Well listen to this song when you really want to throw salt and vinegar into that wound!

The Folks Who Live on The Hill

Peggy Lee Peggy's my favourite and she sings this song with loads of emotion. It's very heartfelt.

Everything: Michael Buble

A great feel good song about getting through anything together with your soul mate!

What A Difference A Day Made: Jamie Cullum

This song is just ripe for that wobbly jazz head when you listen to it. Not that I've ever wobbled my head in a jazz way...not yet.

### **The "Perfect" Interview**

A perfect weekend?

“Three things. Log fire, good movie, cat on my lap.”

The perfect pre-show ritual?

“The only things are I like a dressing room to myself, I never eat before singing and I always wear my granny's earrings.”

The perfect crowd reaction?

“I have to say the best reaction so far was Michael Parkinson. He asked me to come and perform at his hotel and sat in the front row. When I walked off stage he stretched his arms out wide, gave me a huge hug and said “wonderful, wonderful!”.

In a perfect world?

“Animals would have more rights. I love animals and hate the thought that if I ever came back as a cow or a chicken I wouldn't have a choice about being eaten or not! I'm not keen either on people jumping on to horses backs – they never get the chance to say “stop doing that”! I wish I could communicate with animals – I'd like to be their voice and get their point across. Jasper the cat of course is our boy!”

The perfect handbag?

“Is my handbag - and there are many things in there. A tartan sewing kit, cat treats, guitar picks, tooth picks, an hairbrush that folds down into a shoe horn, an iPod and all the trimmings, moist wipes as I hate germs, antibacterial hand stuff, a million kirby grips, a Buddhist chanting list and 5 precepts and elastic band, sunglasses, Totes broly, Tesco Clubcard points (£12.50), some coins of the realm, crumbs and a variety of ball point pens!

A perfect giggle?

“Just funny conversations really. Certain words really make me laugh. Jasper the cat and his expressions.”

The perfect gift?

“Any gift. I've only had one strop about a gift. When I was 10 I wanted a better Christmas present. Mum had made us all dressing gowns and hot water bottle covers from a massive roll of flowery quilted material! We all looked the same in a horrific Von Trapp sort of way!”