

# Danny Boy Dundee Calling

The band with the debut album of the year originally started as Spencer Tracy, but faced with a lawsuit they decided discretion was the better part of bankruptcy and settled on Danny Wilson, a name taken from an old Sinatra movie.

On the line from his Dundee home, singer/songwriter/guitarist Gary Clark explains: "I haven't seen the movie for 10 years but it's my father's favourite film and he keeps moanin' that they never show it on TV. We were pissed off when we had to change our name, as we really liked Spencer Tracy, but we were in a cheeky mood and so we picked on Danny Wilson."

London 0, Dundee 10  
Danny Wilson revolves around

brothers Gary and Kit Clark and long-standing friend Ged Grimes, and except for a two-year lapse in London, their music was shaped in Dundee to a sophistication that's characterised other bands from there, like the Average White Band and the Associates.

"There's a heavy soul tradition here — in a lot of pubs there are bands playing Sam and Dave stuff and things like that so there's quite an emphasis on singers and musicianship. I did a stint with a soul band called Mafia who are quite well

known here. They don't rehearse but they know all these songs inside out and you'd be standing on stage and they'd shout at you, 'This one's in D' or whatever and you had to be pretty quick to pick it up.

"Band's in Dundee seem to be more free and less part of a scene than say Glasgow, say. That's why I live in Dundee, you can detach yourself a wee bit."

What was the reason for going to London?

"Ged and I went to try and get a record deal. We lived in a wee hov-



Kit Clark (top), Gary Clark, Ged Grimes.

el for a while. There were so many bands there and their main objective was to latch onto what the week's big thing was, and a lot of them got signed on the strength of that.

"We got disillusioned and decided to move back to Dundee and do our own thing, which is the best decision we've ever made."

Is London still a big magnet for Scottish bands?

"Everything seems to have to go through there, but now recorded companies are shifting their arses up to Scotland and checking bands out, whereas before you had to go to them.

"When Ged and I moved to London, the press and record companies had shifted their attention from there to the provinces. And here's Ged and I sitting in our wee London hovel reading reviews of some of our mates' bands in *Melody Maker* playing some tiny pub in Dundee. And we thought, there's something wrong here!" (Laughs)

This fashionable shift of attention to the provinces must have made it easier to get a record contract?

"Well, we made loads of demos and sent them to most of the record companies, including Virgin. These were demos of half the album and they were all rejected. It wasn't until we got a live review in the *NME* written by a fan of ours, Bob Flynn, that the record companies were interested. They got in touch with us through him.

"Virgin were the first to turn up and we gave them the demos they'd heard before, but this time they thought they were marvellous. WEA offered us more money but Virgin seemed to have more integrity — they would actually tell you the truth if they didn't like a song, whereas WEA were going 'No problem, you can work with any producer you want, just sign here...' We got a suspicion, so we signed with Virgin."

## Countdown to Ecstasy

The album *Meet Danny Wilson* is a timeless, placeless, priceless gem of craftsmanship that exists on its own terms. Like the Associates and Steely Dan, Clark's two biggest influences, the music on the album has been created independent of fashion or environment.

"That's what we want to do and by doing that the freedom you have to use different influences is so open. We wanted to bare our influences rather than hide them. Where I draw the line is where I get accused of plagiarism, but I'm not ashamed to

talk of influences. Steely Dan's *Countdown to Ecstasy* is one of my all-time favourites and they were so adventurous up to *Pretzel Logic*."

Songs like 'Nothing Ever Goes to Plan' and 'Five Friendly Aliens' also show that Steely Dan's vocalist Donald Fagen had an impact on Clark:

"I love him as a vocalist. My favourite singers would be him, Stevie Wonder, and earlier than that, Nat King Cole and Sinatra. They've got the same ability to sit back on a song.

"I used to listen to my dad's old Sinatra records and that gives singing a sense of importance if you listen to people like that rather than those that just droll."

'Davy', a song often accused of being naive because of its innocence and honest soul, opens the album.

"It was written when we talking about coming home from London, but it's written from the point of view of the person back home rather than the person who sees London. It applies to so many people and situations although it is written from my experience, and like all my songs they're quite honest and personal. It's supposed to be innocent."

Sandwiched in between 'Davy' and one of the album's other brilliantly uplifting songs, the single 'Mary's Prayer', lies 'Aberdeen':

"That song could be about anywhere. It's quite tongue-in-cheek. Songs about towns are always about New York or Chicago and I just wanted to write about somewhere ordinary. I'd finished the song completely but I didn't have the title, just the syllables 'la de da', so I asked Kit to name somewhere really ordinary with three syllables and he said 'Aberdeen'."

And so to 'Mary's Prayer', a single so fine it hurts, but it's disappeared in the race to find the latest Terence Trent D'Arby or anything that can be easily recognised as credible. 'Mary's Prayer' is too good to be No 1:

"There's still time yet, it's starting to pick up in other countries and I've heard it a couple of times on the radio in the last few weeks. I think Virgin are going to re-release it here."

And it's important to sell records?

"Yes, it's important that we pay the record company back so they'll give us money to make another album. Their budgets are so low that if you're not making them some money your career is in jeopardy, and we haven't got over that hump yet because it cost a lot of money to make the album. But I'm quite

sure they'll give us money for another."

Clark was brought up a Catholic, and that upbringing comes out in the imagery of 'Mary's Prayer', 'You Remain an Angel' and 'Steam Train to the Milky Way':

"I'm not a practising Catholic now, I'm spiritual but not religious. The imagery from the old hymns is glorious and there's touches of that in the lyrics.

"But 'You Remain an Angel' is a song about a friend of mine who got into trouble doing smack. 'Steam Train' is spiritual, it almost wrote itself like a wee journey in my head. It's about returning home, but where is your home — is it a physical place or is it inside you?"

The song celebrating Clark's granny's golden wedding, 'Ruby's Golden Wedding' has received a lot of attention because of the character of the song and Lester Bowie's Brass Fantasy Horns. Did you need the expertise of the famous jazz men?

"Yes, I don't think we could've got that sound in Scotland. The Brass Fantasy is so flexible. If you listen to 'I Won't Be Here When You Get Home' his eight-piece band sounds like a big Tijuana band, and on 'Ruby's Golden Wedding' it sounds like a half pit-head brass band with a bit of New Orleans. Their attitude is unique but we've got a lot in common as they take music from all over the place, and that's one of the reasons Lester worked with us because the demos we gave him used so many influences. We didn't want the ordinary funk Earth Wind and Fire-type horns, we wanted richness and character."

Did your gran appreciate 'Ruby's Golden Wedding'?

"When I brought the tapes back I gave them to Mum and Dad but I left off 'Ruby's Golden Wedding' because I knew they would play it to her. Kit eventually played it to my Dad and he snuck a cassette out to her and she was very flattered and emotional about it.

"We played a gig in Edinburgh and she came and saw us but I didn't know she was in the audience. I'm dreading the New Year because I'm sure she's going to ask me to sing it."

"Lester Bowie asked me if he could cover that song and I was incredibly flattered."

And then you asked him for a million dollars?

"[Laughs] No, I said he could have it for nuthin'."

Meet Gary Clark. Get acquainted. **George Kay**

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