



Road To Ruins - Carrie
letting it rip...

Carrie Martin

Heaven and Hull

Hull-born **Carrie Martin** has impressed a lot of people with some CRS shows she has played, and even more with her superb new album *Seductive Sky*. RS caught up with her to find out the fascinating stories behind this new set of songs, and her amazing career resurgence

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The news makes our world look like a very scary place at the moment – but if you need your hope renewed, look no further than Yorkshire's own Carrie Martin. Her latest album *Seductive Sky* is sumptuously full with beautiful, thoughtful lyrics and lush melodies. And the story of her musical journey proves that, indeed – sometimes, good things happen to good people. After a brief stint as a

'rock goddess' in the '80s, she took time off to have a family. She made a tentative return to music, and under the tutelage of the guitar legend Gordon Giltrap, she has blossomed into a singer/songwriter with guitar chops and a voice with the rich, warm texture of caramel. She sat down with me to talk about her new album, her career, and her inspirations, and it's easy to see why pros like Gordon, Oliver Wakeman, and Daniel Karl Cassidy rush to work with this lovely lass!

The story of how she first worked with Giltrap sounds like a dream for many musicians. "I met Gordon by chance. A support act dropped out and I was going to the concert on the night, and I got asked if I would do a couple of songs, and I'd not played on stage for 20 years. I'd only recently got the guitar out, been dabbling with it, gone back for a few lessons. I'd just been

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studying Eva [Cassidy] a little bit, so I'd been doing *Somewhere Over The Rainbow* and her version of *Time After Time*. I was a complete disaster at the soundcheck because I was a bag of nerves, and I went in the dressing room, and Gordon turned up, hung his shirt up, and then just sat there. I was gobsmacked. Because he's the best acoustic guitarist in the country, and people like Ritchie Blackmore have said like, what an amazing guitarist; he's worked with Brian May, Sir Cliff Richard... He said, 'Don't stop playing,' and I thought, 'How can I carry on playing in front of a genius?', and I was shaking. He's got such a calming influence, he sat next to me and he said, 'Carrie, I've got to do an interview; just stay right there, I'm coming back.' He came back, got his guitar out and said, 'Tell you what we'll do, we'll gig this song tonight, together.' This was *Time After Time*. I'm nodding my head going, 'Oh yeah, sounds lovely.' When I got outside I thought, 'Oh my God! What have I just agreed to?' With a guitar legend, and I've not been on the stage with a guitar for years! I thought, 'What am I going to do?'" Of course, she did a wonderful job, and a friendship was born.

Seductive Sky reads like Martin's diary married with poetic prose, including tributes to dear friends, and stories of innocence lost and wisdom gained. But, of course, no album is born in a vacuum. "I did a second album called *What If*. I was quite pleased with that album, and I did have a couple of guests; Gordon played on there and so did Oliver Wakeman. But it's taken me this length of time to get my writing to this level. I felt like this album was a lot better than the second one, even though I was extremely proud of it. But I think I've found my own style now. For such a long while I'd done my own stuff, and I'd done covers, and I think when you do a cover you maybe take a little bit of whoever it is that you're covering. I noticed when I started to do more of my own material, I found myself eventually, and I think that that does show on *Seductive Sky*; I've found my own style now, which I'm really pleased about. I feel comfortable in my writing."

MARTIN WAS NOT ALWAYS COMFORTABLE

as a songwriter. Once again her mentor, Gordon Giltrap, encouraged her to pursue the passion she had for writing. "I've always been fascinated by lyrics. When I was a little girl, I'd save and I'd buy the vinyl, and the first thing I would do would be to sit there and read the lyrics from front to back, two or three times before I even put the record on the turntable. That was from a very young age. I just loved reading lyrics and trying to work out what the person writing was trying to tell me."

After her first gig with Giltrap, things evolved. "We stayed in touch, but he didn't take a real lot of notice of me till I did my very first album, *Luna*, which was a bit of an experiment. The songs were quite basic but it was a start of my songwriting; I used to write when I was younger, but then obviously I gave it up when I stopped playing the guitar. The songwriting's always been there, but I'd gone 20 years without doing anything. *Luna* was about a full moon I saw over Robin Hood's Bay, and I thought it was like a lady dancing across the water. I sent it to Gordon and he said, 'Carrie, you didn't tell me you did songwriting.' I said to him, 'You didn't ask!' And he's like, 'You're a



Carrie with Vintage Viator guitar, a favourite of hers

lyricist'. It took a long time for me to realise that; he saw something in me a lot sooner than I did myself. *Seductive Sky*, I think Gordon saw that coming way before I did. When I'd done *What If*, I thought I'd written the best material that could ever come out of me, and I thought, 'Where do I go from here now?' And I never expected *Seductive Sky* to come. But Gordon knew it was there. I suppose he's got faith in me, and he said, 'There's more to come out of you yet.' I've started writing for the next album, and he's right. I think the stuff that I'm writing now for the next album is better than the *Seductive Sky* material".

Let's not get ahead of ourselves...this album has a plethora of gold to mine. Each track has a story to tell – and each gets better with every play. Martin explains, "The *Woman In Me* is written about a lady that I met that's quite poorly now, and she doesn't go out. I went down to her house to play music for her because she'd bought my album and her husband came to me and said, 'She's in a lot of pain. She struggles. But she loves the sound

of your voice and it soothes her. She can't get out; I don't suppose you could come and do a concert for her in the house?' So I said, 'Yeah, sure I can.' She's got a neurological problem, and she didn't get out; she didn't like her wheelchair. And I just felt like I could give something back to her. She handed me a note as I was leaving and said, 'Don't read this until you get back home.' When I got home and I read it, it was all about her life and what she'd done. And the words in it were, 'I used to be like you. I chased about; I couldn't have enough hours in the day. I used to be a neurological nurse, and now the ladies that look after me are the girls that I trained all those years ago.' She'd been a really busy lady. But those words stuck in my mind – 'I used to be like you.' Basically this letter she wrote me told me about her life, and I thought, 'I've got to put this down'. I messaged her and I said, 'Can I write you song?' And she said, 'I'd love it if you did that.' So I wrote *The Woman In Me*. It was one of those moments where you meet somebody and they're so inspirational. She sits there and she's



so brave. I wanted it to be upbeat, because I didn't want it to be a depressing song or anything. And then Heartbeat, that's another one that's written for a friend of mine who's been going through a bit of a rough time – I wrote that to cheer her up. No Return To Yesterday, that's written about me going to the Llyn Guitars Festival with some fantastic guitarists and feeling a bit like Cinderella, you know, 'What am I doing here amongst all these wonderful people?' When you don't want a day to end because it's just so fabulous and you think, 'The glass slipper's going to fall off soon and I'm going to turn into a pumpkin or something!'"

One of the most compelling tracks on the album is Maria In The Moon, which tackles the subject of child abuse. "That was based on a novel by Louise Beech. We'd been friends for a lot of years and she's been releasing her books as I've been releasing my albums, so we'd been running parallel with each other. She said to me, 'I'd love one of my books to be made into a drama. And you could write the theme tune' and we both started laughing. I said, 'Yeah I could. Give me a brief outline of what this book is about.' She told me, and my heart fell because actually it's about a child that's abused – a woman that was abused as a child. She said, 'Do you still want to write it?' And I sort of stood there dumbfounded and said, 'I'll give it a go but I haven't got a clue where I'm going to start with such a delicate subject.' The next morning I came up with the first line, 'Little girls made of sugar and spice, all things nice, keep them safe in jars upon a shelf.' Like sweeties, that are kept really high up where they can't be got. And then the rest of it just flowed out. And I think that was one of my proudest moments, because I'd actually written something to order, and something that wasn't there within me, if you know what I mean. Somebody put an idea into my head and said 'Can you write this?' That's the first time I've done that, it was an exciting point."

Martin also finds great inspiration in nature. Songs like Holly Blue and Dancing Dragonfly reveal her profound connection to all things wild and wonderful. She loves to include something of nature in the pieces – in fact, she wanted to include the sound of dragonfly wings in the latter. What better way to do it than with violin? "When I initially wrote the full song, that was attached to the front of it, it was a bit of a flurry on the guitar, and I wanted it to sound like a dragonfly hovering about, so I put a nice delay on it. But the problem was it made it quite a long song for airplay. So I split the two tracks, Flight Of The Dancing

"And I've got Daniel Karl Cassidy on there... Eva Cassidy's brother, which is a strange thing because I've got him on the album by accident!"

Dragonfly, which is just the violin and guitar doing triplets, a really fast flurry of notes as if the dragonfly is hovering about. Then it stops, and goes straight into the main track. But then once we'd split it, we thought it was quite nice actually.


"And I've got Daniel Karl Cassidy on there... Eva Cassidy's brother, which is a strange thing because I've got him on the album by accident! I always thought I liked her guitar work because we were very similar that way, and I was playing a guitar show down in Gloucestershire. A couple of days later, this guy called Dan sent me a friend request so I clicked on it, and I'm usually very careful who I accept, but he knew Gordon and two friends of his, so I clicked 'confirm' and then we got chatting. He said, 'I'm a fiddle player'; I said, 'Oh really?' And I thought, 'I'm going to YouTube him and see if he's any good', so I did! And I thought, 'Wow, I like him; he's brilliant.' So I just messaged him back and said, 'Do you fancy playing on my album? I thought I could do with a bit of fiddle on Dancing Dragonfly.' So I sent him those two tracks, and I said, 'Which one do you want to play on?' And he said, 'Both of them.' And I thought, 'Wow, this is brilliant. I've got myself a fiddle player.' A couple of days passed, we'd been conversing on Messenger, and I noticed his Facebook feed started to come onto my page. I thought, 'Oh we've got something in common; he likes Eva Cassidy as well.' And then I suddenly went 'Oh my goodness; Eva Cassidy, Daniel Karl Cassidy, what are the chances that they're related? What if it's a cousin or something?' And so I checked, and then I nearly fell off my seat because I realised that I'd actually been talking to Eva Cassidy's brother! I thought, 'Oh my goodness! If I'd known that at the time, I would never have dared ask him!' So, it was purely by freak of nature, and it was just such a lovely thing to find out who he was. That was another strange occurrence. But one that I'm really pleased happened."

ANOTHER COLLABORATOR ON THIS record is Elliott Randall, the guitarist who gave Steely Dan's Reelin' In The Years its distinctive bite. She fondly recalls, "It's funny because if you listen to No Return To Yesterday, on the last verse it says, 'The man on the steps with the permanent smile / Said slow it down, your reason and your rhyme got lost in time', well that is about Elliott sitting on the steps with me. I played Dancing Dragonfly to him, and he said to me, 'Carrie, this is amazing. What I've got to say to you is slow the whole thing down a little bit. If you play it too fast people won't hear these fabulous words; slow it down a little bit as the song is amazing.' So that's what that means. Elliott's got one of these smiles that you never forget, and he's just so much fun to be with; everybody loves Elliott to bits, because he's such a lovely guy."

And of course, her friend and mentor, Gordon Giltrap appears on the album – as does his wife, Hilary (at least indirectly). Hilary is a geologist and archeologist, who inspires Carrie frequently. "When I wrote Paper Thin, it's about Hilary. The first verse is about her making cards. She will not throw anything away, so if you send Hilary a card, the chances are it will come back to you at some point – she loves to cut them into pieces

and rearrange it. So, 'Collecting lace and paper, press the wishes down', that's Hilary making cards. And the second verse refers to the glass bottles that she dug up, 'They stand beside the window where the morning light shines through, like towers in a fairytale, they're green, they're gold, they're blue.' All these glass bottles from hundreds of years ago are in the windowsill with the sunlight, shining different colours. So that's about the bottles. And the third verse refers to, 'granite stands by gemstone', that's the geology. She wrote the words out and framed them and put them on the wall, which I was really pleased about. It's one of my favourite tracks, but I think that's because I love her so much. She's such a fascinating lady. She was very easy to write about because she's just got so many different angles to her; she's fascinating. She fascinates me, so she's a good subject!" Mrs Giltrap also inspired a line in No Return To Yesterday. "Back down to earth I feel I can breathe, there's a million years that lay beneath our feet that were buried deep', now that's me and Hilary on the beach, because everything you pick up off that beach, she'll tell you where it's come from, how long it's been there. She's an amazing person to walk along the beach with – she's got all this information, which is just fantastic!"

Their friendship grew when Martin kept her company when Giltrap fell ill. The two women found strength and support in each other. "We got to be quite good friends; I went did a bit of recording at his house for him. Then he became quite ill with a stomach problem, and I went down to keep Hilary company, and I ended up being there at a time when things were a bit more serious than first thought. There was a bond then formed between the three of us, because we'd gone through this together. And yeah, it became a solid friendship. He's not just my mentor, him and Hilary are like, just such close friends to me. I love them both to bits. I've been on support with Gordon, going around touring and that. I mean, he got me my first record deal; he got me the endorsement with Vintage; he introduced me to Roger Bucknall, who made me a guitar, so I'm now a Fylde player as well. But the one thing that he gave me, which is totally priceless, is his time. He made me believe in myself again, because when you've been a mum, and brought your children up, sometimes you forget who you are. And it's tricky to find yourself again. I think that was the most important thing. That's the biggest gift he's ever given me. I'm so lucky to be this close to somebody who's such a genius, because obviously, there's a lot of guitarists who'd just give their right arm to be on his lounge floor like I do, tinkling away on a guitar, and like jamming with him. And I stay over at his house, and we'll maybe write a bit of music or something, or I play my tracks; he'll tinkle along."

As the saying goes, that's what friends are for. But when you have the talent and grace that Carrie Martin does, success can't help but follow. Let yourself be enchanted by *Seductive Sky* – you'll be glad you did. 



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