

# BLUES MATTERS!



**B**ack home in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, following a roller-coaster, roaring, successful tour of the UK and France, Debbie Bond remains elated by the whole experience and confirms she is already booking both repeat and new dates and festival gigs for her next tour in 2016.

'Our summer tour of mostly England and Wales, was simply wonderful. We met loads of our old buddies and made loads of new friends along the way,' she says. When Bond mentions her UK buddies, she means playing alongside the likes of some of the country's finest blues musicians, guys who need no introduction to UK blues fans - drummers Sam Kelly, Micky Barker and Pete Hedley, plus soulful Sax-man Sam Carless. As usual she was also partnered by her musical and life-partner, Londoner

'Radiator' Rick Asherson on Keys, Harp and growling vocals.

'Following the tour, tiring though it was at times, I now know I'm up for much more. I'm already looking forward to next year. I know I'm now roadworthy and ready to roll,' she jokes.

And though she evidently had a great time on tour in the UK and France, Bond is clearly happy to be back home. Alabama has been a positive musical inspiration to her and she gladly talks about the extraordinary encounters she has had with some literally legendary US bluesmen from the deep-southern state.

She explains that when she first pitched up in Alabama over three decades ago, she had the great, genuine good-fortune to meet up with one of the State's older blues masters, a guy who travelled the South

and picked guitar with blues music's most notable and revered acoustic talent, Robert Johnson, and who was then still playing bars, clubs and juke joints in his home region - Johnny Shines.

'I moved to Alabama in 1979, after I graduated from university in England - rather serendipitously I would say. I planned to visit for only the summer, staying with friends in the state. I was suffering from a broken heart, and at that time alienated from my scattered family, - at a loose end, looking for a new start. Somehow, I landed in Tuscaloosa, Alabama.. This is also where, the late, great Johnny Shines had settled. One thing led to another and he took me under his wing. I stayed! I couldn't consciously have planned a better blues

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*Debbie Bond*

# DOING IT HER OWN WAY

VERBALS: IAIN PATIENCE VISUALS: ROBIN MCDONALD AND PAUL DUBBELMAN

SINGER, GUITAR PLAYER AND SONGWRITER DEBBIE BOND HAS BEEN PAYING HER DUES IN THE ALABAMA BACKWOODS FOR OVER 30 YEARS. HER SINGING HAS BEEN COMPARED TO BONNIE RAITT AND MARIA MULDAUR, BOTH OF WHOM SHE CITES AS BEING INFLUENCES ON HER MUSIC.



education. I landed in the heart of the blues. Alabama, a state completely overlooked and undiscovered with its thriving blues culture past and present. Those years of getting to sit at the feet, and share the stage, and learn from traditional Alabama blues players like Johnny Shines, Little Whitt and Big Bo, Eddie Kirkland, and Willie King have probably been the greatest influences on my guitar playing, singing and performing style. Playing backwoods juke-joints and festivals, opening for the likes of Bobby Rush, Denise LaSalle; or, for example, getting to see BB King and Little Milton play in a cattle auction barn to a tiny audience in the middle of a Mississippi cotton field. Getting to tour Europe with Little Whitt and Big Bo, as their opening act, a sort-of apprentice with Eddie

Kirkland, Playing in Bettie's Juke Joint most Sunday nights and touring internationally with Willie King. Willie King had the biggest impact on me. Playing festivals here in the USA like the King Biscuit and major European festivals like Cognac with him. Willie was the master of the magic and mystery of performing - just being himself, letting go and doing his thing. I am forever grateful to these bluesmen, but especially Willie for his kindness and generosity. For simply teaching and encouraging me. He loved having a diverse band. And having a woman in the band. He used his music to bring people together - old and young, rich and poor, black and white. He knew music is a powerful thing to bring people together. Vocally, I always loved Bonnie Raitt. I think the mechanics of our

voices have a lot in common - white California girls lost in the blues! I also love the soul ladies like, Ann Peebles, Betty Wright and Aretha Franklin - soul men like Marvin Gaye. In the end, you've just got to do your own thing and be you. As Big Bo would have said, "You can't be nobody else!" It has been a hard road but such a blessing to have been so immersed in this Alabama music culture. I wouldn't trade these experiences for anything,' she laughs.

Another huge influence and source of inspiration has clearly been her musical collaboration and life partnership with British keyboard/harp player Rick Asherson.

'I met Rick, in 2002 through Willie King out in Pickens County, Alabama. Willie introduced us and we were married the next year.

Willie was our best man and the ceremony took place on Freedom Creek, (the site of the annual Freedom Creek Blues Festival, which continues after his passing) on Willie's land. We have been working together, touring and collaborating ever since. This partnership has been a huge blessing and definitely inspiring. It's a huge factor on the growth and development of my music and career. We write together, produce our recordings, book and promote our tours. We both love the music and the life it has given us.'

Looking back at her time with Johnny Shines, Bond adds: 'Johnny Shines was actually born up in Tennessee, but he'd lived in Alabama for some time when I first met up with him. He was incredibly helpful, warm and generous. He taught me so much about this music, letting me sit-in and play alongside him until eventually I joined him and his band 'The Kokomo Blues Band' on the road. In reality, he took me under his wing and opened my eyes and ears to the possibilities of this wonderful music. I owe him so much,' she says.

In addition to Shines, as she gratefully confirms, Bond also played with the late Eddie Kirkland, Sam Lay and many others, working with most of the remaining old blues guys in the area at some point or other in her career, including the late Willie King with whom she toured Europe and played Cognac Blues Passions, arguably the country's premiere blues event, a couple of times as guitarist with his backing band 'The Liberators.'

Life-partner and fellow blues musician 'Radiator' Rick Asherson, also played with the band and produced some of King's finest albums.

Following King's untimely death in 2009, Bond and Asherson have been busy, focusing on their own careers, working the US and European circuit annually while writing and producing music that has been likened to Bonnie Raitt, by a number of commentators.

'I don't have a voice like Bonnie,' says Bond. 'She is truly fabulous. But I think I have a more soulful sound, a proper soul-blues voice that works well for me. And it's great that I have that soul input here, because much of that soul music at its very best comes from good old Alabama.' She confirms that she is already working on her next album, provisionally titled 'Enjoy The Ride', with all of the tracks written and ready to record. Muscle Shoals is a nearby Alabama music studio of world renown and Bond is actively considering it for the forthcoming recording, which has a planned anticipated, release date of January 2016.

Bond has been playing guitar for many years and has mastered many blues styles over the years: 'My Dad was a preacher and my mom was choir director - they split when I was 11. My Dad was adopted and raised by his grandparents but his mother was a travelling singer. You could say music runs in my family. My mother bought me my first guitar and I started playing when I was 13. That was back in 1969 (with tons of good music out there back then!). She got me started. My mum was a single parent at that point, working, and a family friend - an American college student - stayed with us to "baby-sit" during summer. She played guitar, sang and blew harp...pretty amazingly and luckily for me. It introduced me to the

possibilities. Music definitely soothed my troubled soul,' Bond explains.

When asked what turned her into a blues musician, Bond is in no doubt: 'I really loved all kinds of American music early on - folk, blues, rock, and soul. My mother went back to school and became an anthropologist and moved us with her to West Africa to do her field research. At age 14 I did my first performance there, in Sierra Leone, on the only TV station in Freetown - accompanying myself on guitar. It was later, when I was in my first band in college, (Sussex University) that I got more deeply into the blues, soul, and R&B. That was in Brighton, England, as an undergraduate. I sang background vocals in that band. I had it bad early on. One of those inexplicable things. Like Willie King, I think the blues is powerful healing music - the blues got me and wouldn't turn me loose.'

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### STUDIO:

That Thing Called Love 2013

Hearts Are Wild 2011

What Goes Around Comes Around 1998