

Finding Heaven

Words: Jamie Christian Desplaces



"When we reached number one, I went on a four-day binge," says Carlisle. "I remember being on the floor, crying and thinking, 'I don't deserve this, I don't deserve this'. Now I feel I totally deserve it, but it has taken a lot of work on myself to get to that point. Back then, the pressures of fame coupled with so much money, I felt I had to sabotage my happiness."

Her drug and alcohol dependence lasted three decades and Carlisle tells me even without the success, she thinks she'd have still been an addict: "My substance abuse may not have been so extreme, and if I couldn't have afforded coke, it would have been something else. It goes back to childhood, of having no love of oneself. When I was in the Go-Go's, those in the music industry knew I had a problem. From 1990 to 2005, it had become an open secret."

In 2001, Carlisle posed nude as a cover girl for *Playboy*. I ask if it was a subconscious attempt to bare her soul, as well as her body, to the world: "Oh no, I just did it because it was *Playboy*!

As a founding member and lead singer of the Go-Go's, Belinda Carlisle's status as a rock icon was already assured well before she embarked upon her solo journey. Punk pioneers of Girl Power, the Go-Go's were the first all-female act to use their own instruments to write and perform their own songs. Their 1982 debut *Beauty and the Beat* reached number one on the US Billboard album charts and stayed there for six weeks. The group went on to sell in excess of seven million records and are widely considered to be one of the most influential acts of the era. The dream come true, however, fast descended into a nightmare.

How many others get the chance to be Miss August? I have no problem with that magazine – it's been around for over 60 years. It was honour. I have no problem with nudity either." She reminds me the Go-Go's were also the first female celebs to bare all for PETA's 'Rather Go Naked Than Wear Fur' campaign twenty years earlier. Speaking of young, unclothed pop stars, I ask Carlisle her thoughts on Miley Cyrus' current chart and headline dominance.

"When you're that young, with that kind of success, there is no positive way to handle it," she says. "I see her and Justin Bieber acting out and I get it. I empathise with them. They've never had a chance to just be kids."

The whole celebrity thing seems so much more intrusive nowadays?

"I'm lucky that I went through my years at the top with no paparazzi and no camera phones, which I think are hideous. When I do have any kind of pap experience in LA, I find it annoying. I can't imagine how difficult it must be to deal with 24/7. But you know, they court it too, so they can't expect too much sympathy."

Belinda Carlisle is one of the first artists I remember being aware of hearing on the radio as a child (plus my mother was a huge fan). The single 'Heaven is a Place on Earth' was a phenomenon, topping the charts across the globe, including here in New Zealand. I ask Carlisle of her childhood musical memories. "Fifth Dimension's 'Aquarius' I played over and over," she says. "My parents bought me the 45. The Beach Boys' *Pet Sounds* had a big impact, especially growing up in southern California. They're part of me on a cellular level."

When I told people about this interview, your name was always met with genuine warmth. Do you find you seem to hold a special place in people's hearts?

"Well, no-one's ever come up to me to say they hate me! But, I guess some of

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Carlisle's defining moment came nearly nine years ago when she kicked her addictions for good. "You can't carry on the way I was carrying on and expect to live," she says. "It was an easy choice: live or die." Her marriage to Morgan Mason has lasted an incredible 28 years and they have a 21-year-old son, James. Since the mid-90s, they have lived between France and California. Belinda has also spent a great deal of time in India, where she is involved with charitable causes and has set up her own textile business. She does yoga daily and also practices Nichiren Buddhism: "I started to get into it towards the end of my drug years. Any sort of meditation makes you sit and face yourself. There was much dishonesty and many secrets in my life and it cleared a lot of Karma."

Carlisle is considering taking a gap year next autumn to move to Bangkok. She wishes to travel and meditate, though "still do a little work". The period of sobriety, she tells me, has been far more interesting than her previous 23 years of singing. I ask if she has experienced a re-birth. If she feels she has now had two lives. "I wouldn't say that," she smiles. "It feels like I've had about nine."

Belinda Carlisle will be performing at the Bruce Mason Centre on 13th December