

# HEAVEN AT HOME

Singer Belinda Carlisle has finally laid to rest the drug and alcohol demons, to the point where she can write about the battle, although it was the hardest thing she's ever done, **Sally Browne** reports



Inward looking: Belinda Carlisle now; and with The Go-Go's (facing page)

IT'S hard to believe that even the south of France has a winter, but Belinda Carlisle is experiencing it right now.

"I'm looking out the window and I see the mountains and the sea and the island in the bay of Cannes. It's a cloudy day and it's freezing outside!"

"But I have one of the most beautiful views in the world, I think. I live on the Cote d'Azur and I can see for miles."

"It's gorgeous."

It's the place she's called home for the past 18 years with her husband, Morgan Mason, a former White House aide and the son of actor James Mason, and her 18-year-old son James Duke Mason, a gay rights advocate and budding actor.

"I'm enjoying my time at home – I'm never here," says the busy singer, who still tours regularly, and will be in Queensland next month.

France is a place dear to her heart. But the other place on the planet where the California girl spends a lot of her time is India.

The former Go-Go's singer visits the Subcontinent regularly and it has been an important part of her healing journey, as she battled addictions to drugs and alcohol.

"I love it for a lot of reasons, but I decided I needed a reason to justify the time I spend there,

so I decided to start an online store under Carlisle-Mason that would be up and running by now.

"But this past month I was contacted by a top department store in America – which I don't want to jinx so I'm not going to name it – to create a homeware line for them, which I travel to India to do, so it justifies my time there. So I don't feel like I'm just laying around doing yoga all the time, which I have a tendency to do."

She's excited about the project, which will be launched this year. "It's my baby," she says.

India has been her spiritual home since she first visited 15 years ago.

"A lot of life changes happened for me there," she says. "A couple of really pivotal moments happened there, for the good, too."

"Everything is about the divine or about God, or whatever you want to call it, and I love that."

"And also there's some great yoga teachers there, and I'm a yoga head, so I'm there practising and studying an awful lot."

"Whatever you need it has to offer and whenever I go I come back a slightly altered person. And I'd like to think for the better."

Carlisle, 52, has written a book about her journey called *Lips Unsealed*, released last June. A candid account, it covers her childhood in a lower-middle-class home in Hollywood, her days living it up with The Go-Go's in LA's pop-punk scene, her battle with drugs and her spiritual growth in India to today.

Writing it was one of the hardest things she's ever done.

"I'm proud of it but let me tell you it wasn't easy," she says.

"I always knew that I had a book in me. I just needed some clarity and some objectivity and it was the right time (to start it) a couple of years ago."

"I don't think I'll ever do it again. But it was rewarding and I got a lot of great feedback. It's an adventurous rock 'n' roll story, but it also has a lesson, which was kind of what I wanted to do. I wanted the book to have a good message for people."

The difficulty, she says, was going back and reliving some of those memories.

"I think it was trying to break through memories and just trying to dig for feelings and things. I've done a lot of therapy in the past six or so years and also with the 12-step program but this was sometimes on levels that I was really surprised to my own reaction of things that were coming out."

"So, it was difficult emotionally sometimes to do."

Carlisle has spoken openly about her battle with drugs over the years – each time saying that she had finally beaten those demons. But it seemed they always found her again.

It wasn't until a cocaine binge in 2005 rocked her awake that she realised it was now or never.

"I didn't really get it the first time around to be honest," she says now.

"My first attempt at sobriety



was back in 1985 and I didn't pay attention and I didn't do what was suggested to me, which is what you should do.

"I just decided, being as bull-headed as I am, to do it my way, and it sort of worked for a few years but I slipped back into the old habits.

"And now I have almost six years of sobriety and I can kind of laugh about it because I really didn't get the plot.

"You can never say never but I can say to anybody who says that the obsession of drugs and alcohol can't be lifted - it can be and I'm a testament to that."

"Because drugs and alcohol were pretty much a part of everyday life for 30 years, so, to go from that to not even being on my radar, to not even thinking about it, is pretty amazing."

And it was in her beloved India that many of those life-altering moments took place. She recalls an experience with a great kundalini yoga teacher about three years ago that triggered a process of awakening.

"I can't even explain it," she says. "Kundalini is like the internal yoga, and it breaks through a lot of emotional barriers, and a lot of negative stuff that

the early '80s, Carlisle has forged a successful career, reinventing herself as a solo artist and setting hearts afire with hits such as *Mad About You* and *Heaven Is a Place on Earth*, *Summer Rain* and *Leave a Light On*. She even recorded an album, *Voila*, in French.

So how different does she feel to the bubbly young woman seen splashing about in a water fountain in the film clip to *The Go-Go's Our Lips Are Sealed*?

"I was probably a lot more naive back then in a very, very good way," she says. "But basically I'm still the same person. I may not look like it but there's a punk rocker that still lives inside of me," she adds with a laugh.

And it's that rock star, albeit a little grown up, who will be coming out to Australia to tour this year.

Her last visit to Australia was as part of the Here and Now tour, which included a roll call of 1980s favourites including Kim Wilde and the Human League. Carlisle has continued to tour with '80s pals such as Boy George on further Here and Now tours overseas.

"It's great for the artists; it's great for the audience. It's a blast. There's not a lot of heavy ego backstage.

## Feel-good rockers like to be laid back

But the thrill is still there for the Klaxons, writes Sally Browne

JAMIE Reynolds from the Klaxons is in a chatty mood. The frontman of the popular British "new rave" rockers has just come off stage in Oxford and is lying on the floor of his dressing room clutching a phone as we chat long distance.

Not only is he experiencing his post-gig high, he has another set of gigs to look forward to before the band heads Down Under to play the Sunset Sounds festival.

"I'm excited. I'm looking forward to it," he says from his supine position.

"It will be a celebration of some new and old faces we haven't seen in a long time."

Interpol, Public Enemy, the National, Cold War Kids, Paul Kelly, Angus and Julia Stone, The Living End, Ladyhawke and Washington will also be playing the two-day festival, which hits Brisbane on Thursday.

The Klaxons have done the rounds of festivals in the UK and Europe, but Reynolds reckons his best festival story is "our story".

"I actually met James

(Righton, keyboardist) at Glastonbury festival," he says. "I was lying on my back and he leaned over me and I remember he had really white teeth."

So lying on his back is a bit of a habit, then.

Reynolds' enthusiasm for visiting Australia may sound like the usual lip service bands pay their waiting fans across the globe, but this guy seems to genuinely mean it.

Despite playing in the Klaxons for more than five years, he says it's a thrill he hasn't quite got over.

"When I get off the stage, like tonight, I'm reminded of why I love it," he says.

"Making people happy and seeing them enjoy your music, it doesn't get much better than that. I can't think of many jobs you could do that could be much better."

And it's the reciprocal enthusiasm from the Klaxons'

audience that has helped the band weather some storms in the British media.

After becoming indie darlings with their debut album, *Myths of the Near Future*, the band received a bit of a backlash during the making of their second album, *Surfing the Void*. It was reported that many tracks had made the cutting room floor after the label deemed them "too experimental" and that the band were taking too long on the record. Reynolds says that's all nonsense.

He blames the confusion on getting drunk and talking to a journalist early one morning.

His version of events is much simpler. "My story is we're a fun bunch of boys who like to take our time doing what makes us feel good," he says. "We might release an album of slow music down the track."

"I read such funny stuff in the UK press, but the only way I can judge how people like it is by standing on stage and watching people's reaction."

The Klaxons play Sunset Sounds, City Botanic Gardens, Brisbane, on Thursday.

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