



Hit the road, Jaxx: Simon Ratcliffe (left) and Felix Buxton will bring their dance act to Brisbane next month

# BACK IN WHITE

It has been a long time between drinks but Basement Jaxx are ready to unleash a new record and live show, writes **Sally Browne**

BRITISH dance act Basement Jaxx seem to be attracted to strong women.

Not only have the popular hit-makers worked with Cyndi Lauper and Lily Allen, they also recorded with the formidable Yoko Ono.

Ono will be one of the stars of their highly anticipated new album, which Simon Ratcliffe, one half of Basement Jaxx, "promises" will be finished in a couple of weeks.

"I nearly promise," he qualifies.

Fans have been waiting some time for the next instalment in Basement Jaxx's 15-year career.

Their last album, *Crazy Itch Radio*, came out in 2006 and included contributions from Allen and Swedish sensation Robyn.

For this project, they worked with a number of other stars including Yo Majesty, Santo Gold, Lightspeed Champion and Australian Sam Sparro, although they are yet to decide which tracks will make it on the album. They were hoping to make it a double album at one point.

They recorded the song with Ono in New York in April 2007.

"The beginning of 2007, that's when we started the album," Ratcliffe says and then adds: "Is that when we started the album?" He sounds almost surprised.

Basement Jaxx heard that Ono was a fan through a journalist, so they asked her if she'd be up for a collaboration.

Yoko said yes — but she could only

give them one hour of her time and any friends who wanted to meet her were asked to stay away.

"She was in and out within an hour," says Ratcliffe.

"And she doesn't do this very often, apparently. She came in and we had the music prepared and she really liked it and just did it, and gave us Yoko Ono for an hour.

"We had friends who wanted to come see her but we were told she really doesn't like crowds of people anywhere. We had to vacate the studio and have as few people there as possible. She's had a few people mess her around over the years. She's a bit mistrustful of people, I think, these days.

"She was really, really nice," he continues. "And really happy to give us what we wanted."

Ratcliffe wrote the track especially for her, inspired by her experimental work of the 1970s and '80s.

"I love Yoko Ono and I love what she does and the music I think is sympathetic of the 70s and the '80s and kind of feels like it suits her in a way.

"I'm completely at ease with her voice, but some people, it really gives them a shiver.

**'Cyndi Lauper's got this really strong Queens accent. It's really odd that someone like that could suddenly be in your studio'**

"It's not everyone's cup of tea. I wouldn't say it's going to be No. 1 or anything, but it's a really cool track that I'm really proud of, so that's going to be on the album."

On this cold crisp London morning, Ratcliffe takes the call on return from the post office, where he has just picked up a device to go with his Xbox, which he got for his birthday in December.

Simon spent Christmas and the New Year in Melbourne, where he and his Australian partner visited family with their two-year-old daughter.

He was going to DJ on New Year's Eve, but forgot to take his record with him, so he ended up watching the fireworks in Melbourne instead.

"This time I was only able to stay in Australia for about 10 days, which is a pretty quick trip, but I had to get back to finish the album," Ratcliffe says.

Basement Jaxx will return next month to headline the Future Music Festival, along with N.E.R.D, Grandmaster Flash, CSS and Paul Oakenfold. The tour will feature the full Basement Jaxx crew in action, which includes vocalists and musicians, about 10 people all up.

Ratcliffe can't remember the last time they played live.

"The shows in Australia will be the first live show we've done for a long time and it will be with slightly changed personnel — a bit of an unknown, really. I hope it goes all right, I'm sure it will. I feel slightly anxious about it."

But they haven't been entirely idle. Last year Basement Jaxx also spent time working with Lauper for her new record, the fabulous dance-oriented *Bring Ya to the Brink*.

They were enchanted with the Queens, New York, character who showed up in their dingy London studio.

"She's a real character," Ratcliffe says. "She's got this really strong Queens accent. I remember her from when I was 13. It's really odd that someone like that could suddenly be in your studio."

"Our studio's tiny — it could be someone's bedroom. It's so small and unglamorous in a really scruffy part of town."

She spent two days with them to record the song *Rocking Chair*, and then worked with the pair via email from around the world.

Although they've worked with many stars, Ratcliffe says the mysterious and elusive Grace Jones tops their guest collaborator wishlist.

**Basement Jaxx will perform at the Future Music Festival, Brisbane Turf Club on March 7.**