

LIFE is busy in the land of La Roux. Our first interview is postponed when frontwoman Elly Jackson is whisked away in a taxi to be fitted for an outfit to wear to the Brit Awards.

The fitting is for a Gucci suit, no less, from this season's menswear catalogue.

When we finally speak, on the phone a few days later, Jackson is flying down the motorway on the way to a speech therapist.

Last year, she cancelled shows after becoming ill and losing her voice, largely due to fatigue.

"I spoke to a few vocal coaches and they said that a speech therapist might help." It just trains you even when you're not singing, how to sit up straight when you speak, which registers of your voice you should use so you're not damaging your voice even when you speak.

And so the positive-thinking, independent young woman, who is a No.1 star in the UK, is back on track – which should get her down to Australia in time for the Bacardi Express tour at the end of this month.

The tour, which will take bands such as La Roux, Art Vs Science, Yves Klein Blue, Miami Horror and The Cassette Kids rattling along in a vintage train between places including Coffs Harbour and Newcastle, will start in Brisbane on March 25.

The bands will play shows at each stopover, arriving in Sydney on March 27.

Tickets to the concerts are free, but if you want to get in you must register at [www.bacardiexpress.com.au](http://www.bacardiexpress.com.au).

It's the third year of the travelling expedition, but the first time it hits Brisbane.

While the Bacardi Express is based on an old hippie idea from 1970, when famous passengers such as Janis Joplin and the Grateful Dead crossed Canada in a train to play a series of festivals, it's the late '70s and 1980s that influence La Roux.

The band would not look or sound out of place in a line-up



# Back on track

UK star La Roux is heading to Australia for the train trip of her life, writes **Sally Browne**

that included Eurythmics, David Bowie or Flock of Seagulls.

But while it's from acts such as these that La Roux might take its cues, Jackson was actually raised on a diet of Joni Mitchell and Bob Dylan.

It was co-writer and producer Ben Langmaid – the other, less visible, half of the La Roux equation – who introduced her to Bowie about five years ago.

**Busy girl: Elly Jackson has her musical roots in the 1970s and '80s**

He started her off with his earlier, folksy records *Hunky Dory* and *The Man Who Sold the World* before easing her into his more experimental electronic work from the 1970s.

"Bowie was the first thing Ben ever played me," she recalls.

"I remember seeing him on the cover of *The Man Who Sold the World* and thinking, 'That is a woman; you can't be telling me that is a man', when you see this long tunic-like dress on a chaise longue or something. I remember thinking, 'God, you're mad!'"

But Jackson now embraces her own androgynous look, her red hair whipped up into a quiff that girls in London streets are now copying. It's something she says she was not brave enough to experiment with in high school.

"I think I would have been a bit too scared to try it out, really. It's something that came later with confidence, when I sort of

something she herself laughed off. "A DJ I actually still like said, 'I think this is only meant for dogs'. You've just got laugh at it."

"Everyone texted in (to the radio station) and said how much they hated it, but then it was No.2 for two months. You can't take this stuff too seriously."

But with the occasional bad, there is plenty of good.

"I think the nicest thing is when people really get the record right. When they say, 'You brought the emotion from folk music and that sort of fragile side of things to the '80s electronic sound that you were dancing and getting off to in your late teens', and when people get things right like that, that's really nice."

Her favourite clip from the '70s-'80s period? She nominates David's Bowie duet with Bing Crosby, where they sing Christmas song *Little Drummer Boy* around a piano.

"I remember saying to my manager, 'David Bowie never does anything shit'. And he said, 'That's a load of bollocks. Watch this!'"

Despite her hectic schedule, Jackson says life hasn't changed too much and that's the way she likes it. Friends and family have warned her not to let the industry change her.

"The only thing that's changed is that there are more people at my gigs and stuff like that," she says. "But my personal life hasn't changed at all. If I get time on my own I usually use it to sleep or just think about things because I don't usually get time on my own."

"The rest of the time you're trying to catch up with people you haven't seen for a long time. You start to get the friends guilt because you haven't called so-and-so."

**La Roux performs at the Tivoli as part of the Bacardi Express tour on March 25.**

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was like. 'Actually I don't want to dress like everyone else'. It just took a bit more time for me to get the confidence to do it. And I think this job helps. It gives you a bit more of an excuse."

But while it might be her look that gains her attention, she has the songs to back it up.

Tracks such as *In for the Kill* and *Bulletproof* were huge hits in the UK, charting at No.2 and No.1 respectively. They have received global airplay, including on TV show *Cougar Town*, fulfilling the world's craving for '80s-inspired electronica.

But not everyone gets La Roux. Jackson's voice has been unkindly likened to a mosquito,

**"THE FUNNIEST AND MOST UPLIFTING SHOW IN LONDON"** Daily Mail (UK)

**Calendar Girls**  
by Tim Firth

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## CD REVIEWS

**POP**  
**Soldier of Love**  
Sade

(Sony Music)



★★★★☆

There's a lesson to learn from Sade's music: enjoy the atmosphere. Do not listen to the lyrics. On her 1992 *Love Deluxe* album she described a starving Somali woman's daily struggle as hurting like brand new shoes. On *Soldier of Love*, her band's first album in a decade, she uses consumer culture to demystify the concept of enduring paternal love, explaining that daddy love comes with a lifetime guarantee. She mixes metaphors ("I am a broken house, I'm holding on a broken bough") and invents bizarre similes ("The small step I take is a mountain stretched out a like a lazy dog"). But Sade also knows how to seduce. So bathe in the sublimely cool atmosphere created by the woman who practically invented the genre of cafe music. Welcome back, Sade. You're as welcome as double reward points on a credit card. I think you know what I mean.

**Graeme Hammond**

**ROCK**  
**Valleys of Neptune**  
Jimi Hendrix

(Sony)



★★★★☆

In the 40 years since his death, the Hendrix vaults have been ruthlessly plundered, so fans have every reason to be wary about the pre-release hype surrounding *Valleys of Neptune*. Thankfully, despite uneven material and sound quality, this is one of the better posthumous releases. The real gem is the title track, a beautiful, spacey ballad. None of the other three "new" songs come close. *Ships Passing Through the Night* is still at rehearsal stage and *Lullaby For Summer* and *Crying Blue* are not much more than jams. The poppy *Axis* outtake *Mr Bad Luck* is fun, but the versions of the over-familiar *Stone Free* and *Fire* are redundant.

**Garry Williams**

**BLUES**  
**The Way of the World**  
Mose Allison

(ANTI-/SHOCK)



★★★★☆

On the liner notes, producer Joe Henry describes Allison as "a great swaying bridge... linking the '50s to the present; the mystical country blues to the urbanity of jazz". How true. Allison, at 82, is a still-witty veteran Mississippi bluesman with a lived-in voice and a style all his own. Allison is playful on his first studio album in 12 years, with the distinctive laconic singing, the biting wit and a piano style that is at times delightfully imperious but always fluid. There's a bit of gospel, shuffling swing and solid bebop and some nice bluesy ballads with backing from guitars, bass, drums and sinewy sax.

**Bryan Patterson**