

I wrote that

Two nominations, one win. Not bad going for a Bolton lad who isn't into awards. Gordon Masson meets Simon Aldred, the man behind *Cherry Ghost*, and the Ivor-judged Best Contemporary Song of 2007

'I don't really follow awards to tell the truth,' says Simon Aldred, whose single *People Help The People* was named Best Contemporary Song of 2007 at the 53rd Ivor Novello Awards.

'It's nice and it's flattering, I can't deny that, but it's my culture because I'm from Bolton, I guess, that I just keep my feet on the ground. While I was pleased to hear about the single nomination, I was even more pleased about the album, *Thirst For Romance*, getting the nomination for the Album Award.'

Recalling the time and place he penned *People* he explains: 'I was on the dole at the time and it was my last shot at trying to make some sort of career in music. It wasn't a cynical ploy, but I knew that if you're going to get someone's attention you need to write songs that work on radio. So it needed to have a hook.'

'I'm a bit of a curmudgeon,' he confesses. 'In my personal opinion, I've written better tunes, but I knew what I needed to do to get people's attention and it worked. So, lyrics aside, I was mindful of the fact that it needed to be a pop song. And I think it's a good pop song,' he says. 'I was proud when it was being played on Radio 1 and Radio 2 alongside huge behemoth pop machines like Beyonce

and what not. When I wrote it, I knew that it had an immediacy to it that would probably make it popular.'

The single did indeed prove popular, reaching number 27 in the UK charts last summer. It has also been singled out for its poetic and melancholic style. When it comes to the message behind it, Aldred is refreshingly candid: 'I was at a bit of a low and I think you're much better understanding people who are on a downer when you're actually there yourself. It's very difficult for happiness to understand unhappiness and vice versa.'

On his composing methodology, Aldred explains: 'For me, the guiding principle is the lyric. Having just done 12 months of touring, a good lyric is the thing that gives a song longevity, I think. I just get really wound up by badly written lyrics - if it's at all cheesy or contrived or it's cliched, I'll sing it maybe 10 or 11 times and then I'll just get really bored of it. When you're doing 12 months of touring, you can't really get away with that.'

Aldred's lyrics are a paean to the characters of his northern, working class background. His favourite song on the album is *Mary On The Mend*, which tells the story of divorce and alcoholism; while *Alfred The Great* is



David Fisher

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based loosely on his grandfather and parents, the kind of people 'who have been through a war, worked in factories, left school at 14...'

If Aldred's sensibilities seem skewed towards the literary, that's because they are. His MySpace page quotes Albert Camus and his album, he says, is inspired by the lyrical works of Yorkshire poet Stevie Smith.

An Ivor Novello award often caps

the pinnacle of a songwriter's career, and in the midst of all the accolades, it's easy to forget that *Thirst For Romance* is a debut album. Which makes Aldred an even more exciting prospect - his best songs, he says, are still to come.

People Help The People Written by Simon Aldred
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