



The man who makes music happen

Zac Ware is never happier than when he is playing a guitar and singing a song. He does this in many ways, Melissa Blease discovers, including playing guitar with The Proclaimers, putting songs together with other musicians in his state-of-the-art studio and entertaining others by playing his Guitar Jukebox of across-the-decades greatest hits



Photograph by Andy Manns

It's like, y'know, when you're at a really good party, and there's a guy in the kitchen, jamming on his guitar, and everybody's singing their hearts out? Well that's me; I'm that guy!"

That's multi-tasking Bath-born musician, songwriter and producer Zac Ware talking about his Guitar Jukebox: a live, "one-man guitar plug-in" on hand to provide a soundtrack/backdrop of bespoke, across-the-decades greatest hits for one night only several nights a year in Bath's best live music venues. Sounds like fun? Oh, and then some! But there are many, many more strings to Zac's bow; we're talking to a man who literally makes music happen, in multiple ways.

The evening before Zac and I spoke, he'd been ensconced in his Bath studio (in Kensington Place) "Doing a songwriting thing on Zoom", as he puts it. "One of us was in New York, somebody else was in Ireland, and another Zoomed in from Devon. International songwriting – it's very interesting!", says Zac. Interesting indeed – and we'll be investigating just how interesting later on; right now, there's another point of interest to explore immediately.

While Zac was doing his "international songwriting" thing, he was on a rare break from taking his guitar on tour with the enduringly popular Scottish pop-rock duo The Proclaimers, which started in Bristol in May and trundles all the way through to Tunbridge Wells

in September, taking in Blackpool, Leeds and Swansea along the way. But Zac isn't the support act; he's actually in the band... well, sort of.

"I've been playing guitar with The Proclaimers for 19 years this year," says Zac. "But no, I'm not a Proclaimer! If I left the lineup, nobody other than the people who follow the band live would actually know – they'd still be The Proclaimers, doing their thing. But you could say I'm a big part of that thing; we all are – the current drummer is the newest member, and he joined 13 years ago! We're a very tight unit, and we played on the last three records as a band, but it's very much The Proclaimers – as in, Craig and Charlie Reid – making the music."

Ah, okay – I think? As we've established, Zac's been making music happen around him all the time, with all kinds of people, for a long time. But where did his very own, very fascinating soundtrack begin?

Zac was born in Bath in 1971. "My dad Charles had been involved in the music business throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, so I grew up with music around me, and I always had this idea that I could be a musician, an artist, too. There was never that awful thing about 'go and get a proper job' from my dad; I always knew that there were real possibilities in music as a career, and real opportunities, not just fantasies. So yes, I was into music from an early age. And then my uncle, who had been involved in theatre

world too – he'd worked for bands like Queen and Led Zeppelin, putting stage sets together and stuff like that – bought me a guitar and again, there was that sense of making music possible. Then my friend Hollis taught me to play *Pretty Vacant* by the Sex Pistols on that guitar, and I never looked back".

But hang on, Zac; before we start to move forward on how and why you never looked back, can we just rewind on your family connections? After all, to say that Zac's father was a very interesting man would be a bit of an understatement.

"Indeed he was!" Zac concurs. "Dad was Bryan Ferry's benefactor, back in the very early days of Ferry's career. He had some money from properties and stuff that he was doing in Bath in the 1960s, and I think my aunty was going out with Bryan Ferry's sax player. They all went to art school, so there was that whole art school thing going on with all of them. It's a great backstory for a contemporary musician for sure, but I was only tiny at the time – only just at the bouncing around on their knee type age! So I missed out on some great parties, apparently: all that 1960s stuff, with naked women everywhere and all the arties on the old Pulteney Street scene. But whatever went on, it all definitely gave me my own sense of where I come from, connected with that world in some way, you know?"

Think of this: a great song goes way beyond the songwriter; it has a life of its own.

"Those" parties aside, bouncing around on Bryan Ferry's knee must indeed embed rock roots. But again, before we follow those roots through to their contemporary flourish, we need to pay further tribute to Zac's dad Charles, who not only established the now globally renowned Morris Minor Centre on Lower Bristol Road in Bath in 1976, but established himself as one of the prime movers and shakers in the preservation of Kingsmead Square, various Victorian terraces houses around Combe Down, and the regeneration of Camden. "Saving Kingsmead Square from the developers: apparently dad walked in on a meeting and said, 'I've got some money, I'll back it!,'" says Zac. "It was a bit like how he thought about about Bryan Ferry: that seems like a good idea!"

When Charles fell ill in 2010, Zac and his partner Lucy relocated back to Bath from their then-home in Glasgow to take care of him and the Morris Minor Centre, eventually turning, in Zac's own words, "the home of everybody's favourite old banger into a beacon in the world of classic cars". Charles passed away in 2016 and today the Morris Minor Centre continues to thrive under new ownership, although no longer in Bath. But if Zac and Lucy did Charles proud, he'd no doubt be even prouder of where Zac's at today.

"Working in the music business – or in the arts in general – is, today, very different to how it was back in dad's day," says Zac. "There's huge pressure to do everything yourself, way beyond just 'creating': producing your own work, promoting yourself, arranging gigs, getting a website together, managing your social media – and cashflow! Nobody gets any funding from record labels anymore. Arts Council funding was quite strong for a while but that's been cut back, and so has Lottery

funding; loads of people are chasing the same pots of money. But in order to succeed, you've really got to recognise where you stop and where other people's work begins – my work, if you like!"

Zac's fully professional, state-of-the-art studio (which he built in his garden, in lockdown) is, today, a one-stop shop for musicians who want to get serious about their craft. "Basically, we can put songs together, together" says Zac. "It's not just production that people need; they need arrangement, and help with making a particular song work: is the song right, for them; do the words make sense; is the intention of the story within that song told correctly? In terms of development, we do a monthly, fortnight-long song challenge with groups of people who may not have worked together before; I'm now on my 14th month of doing that and I've met a really strong core of people who want to be songwriters. When the quality is high enough, I can help get songs release-ready, and we all work out how to help each other, and contact management, agencies, publishers – it's all about support". Want to learn to play guitar properly? Zac can teach you how to that, too!

And all the time, throughout it all, Zac's doing what he knows and loves best.

"I'm happiest when I'm just playing a guitar, and singing a song. And when the studio's all plugged in and I've got local songwriters in, that's really exciting stuff!" he says. "And think of this: a great song goes way beyond the songwriter; it has a life of its own. Think of The Proclaimers song *Sunshine on Leith*; I've met people whose lives that song, quite literally, saved. A song really can have power."

And so too, it seems, can the universe. On the day we contacted Zac to arrange this interview, he was considering how to manage his time – and all his various initiatives – after the current Proclaimers tour finishes in the autumn. "It was the anniversary of dad's death, on 4 July," says Zac. "And then, your email popped up. I thought to myself, this is something lovely; dad must still be watching out for me!"

Ah, there's surely a song in there somewhere? Cheers, Charles! And cheers to Zac, too: the man who makes music happen. ■

Zac Ware Music: zacware.co.uk

Zac's Guitar Jukebox, Flan O'Briens, 21 Westgate Street, Bath, Friday 29 September



Zac Ware on stage with The Proclaimers (Charlie and Craig Reid) at T In The Park. Photo credit Colin Usher

