

There can't be many more pleasurable ways of spending an hour than in the company of *Slow Down*, Liane Carroll's latest collection of 14 hand-picked ballads. Including material recalled from her childhood and teenage years, the singer's most personal recording to date features one spine-tingling song after another.
29.08.07

Liane Carroll - In Praise Of Slow

Recorded in just four hours, Liane Carroll's new album, ironically titled *Slow Down*, underlines just what the singer/pianist has achieved over a career that saw her beginning as a teenager. Something of a "best kept secret" for much of her career it's only in the last few years, as Peter Quinn explains, that Liane has got the recognition that she deserves.

I'm happily ensconced with Liane Carroll in Porters Wine Bar, an appealing watering hole in Hastings Old Town and one of the singer's regular gigs for the past 18 years. An effusive and animated conversationalist, in between the various "hellos" and "how are yous" from seemingly everyone who passes by our table, Liane is relating a childhood anecdote that's revealing on several counts.

"I was about eight or nine and I was put in a choir at an Anglican church, St Peter's in Malden. Over the road was the Catholic church, St Teresa's, and they used to have a Mass slightly earlier than our Sunday service. I'm not a religious person at all, but the music was so passionate. It was 'put the fear of God into all of you' music. So I went home and asked my Mum if I could become a Catholic and she almost fell off her chair. I said, 'I just want to sing at St Teresa's, they've got better music.' It wasn't that it was better music, it was just more moving."

Apart from displaying a precocious critical nose – she never did become a Catholic, by the way – the story conveys three fundamental aspects of the singer's musical make-up that run through our conversation like the lettering on a stick of rock: complete openness; absolute honesty; and an intense, at times overwhelming, response to the power of music. This final trait, reacting to music at an almost molecular level, seems to have been (and continues to be) something of a blessing and a curse.

"It's been pretty much constant since I was a child. I remember being very moved by hymns at school. It used to make me cry, to the point where it got almost embarrassing. I went through a period when I was a bit scared to listen to music because it was getting too painful, it was getting too much. I couldn't quite cope. It was about what it would do to me – I felt that I'd be completely enveloped and that I'd never come out. I felt like I had to stop listening for a while, and I still struggle."

Performing professionally since the age of 15, and building her formidable reputation without the backing of a big PR machine or major label, in 2005 the Hastings-born singer and pianist finally scored the almighty coup that, for many people, was overdue to the point of incredulity: Carroll claimed two of the BBC Jazz Awards ('Best of Jazz' and 'Best Vocalist'), the first time any artist had claimed two titles in the same year. Whatever one's views on the relative worth of such gong-giving fests, seeing the official photo of a beaming Carroll on the BBC's website you felt that the world was somehow a slightly fairer place. For the singer, too, it felt like something of a watershed. "The recognition was brilliant. In a way, it was the right time for me to start accepting graciously the sort of compliments I'd had, because I was dreadful at it before."