

## Snow Patrol

Rock'n'roll high jinx comes in many forms. There's the drinking games, then the bus-surfing and, of course, the groupies. But for Glasgow based four piece Snow Patrol, the height of pop star high jinx came with an X-rated football tackle on 90s pop star, Lyndy Layton of Beats International/ Dub Be Good To Me fame.

“We were messing around on the dance floor of an awards ceremony recently,” says Snow Patrol's charismatic, guitar-swinging lead singer, Gary Lightbody. (Nickname: Gimp. “Because I'm a gimp.”) “Our manager tried to tackle me to the floor for some reason and he ended up launching me into her. It was very embarrassing.”

The same no frills sense of adventure informs Final Straw, Snow Patrol's third album. Already established as a heart-crushing mix of distorted British pedal rock and US alternative guitar pop on home soil, the album sees the band grow up, fill out and with some aplomb, make one of the best British records you'll hear this year.

But success hasn't come easily and the Snow Patrol back-story began way back at Dundee University in 1994 when Lightbody bumped into guitarist, Mark McClelland. (Nickname: Maps. “Because he can find his way around any city.”) “Our eyes met across the crowded dance floor,” says Lightbody. “I knew he was the one for me. We clicked musically and we liked the same bands, so we thought ‘Why not start one of our own?’ That was the beginning of Snow Patrol.”

Well, not quite. The first band name picked out by the duo was Polar Bear, a title also being used by ex-Jane's Addiction bassist, Eric Avery. When the threat of a lawsuit loomed, Lightbody and McClelland had a rethink and went for the equally wintry Snow Patrol. Still they had the last laugh and after signing to Scotland's Jeepster records (home to Belle and Sebastian, amongst others), the three piece, now with drummer Johnny Quinn in place (Nickname: Thunderclap. “Because he drums so bloody hard.”), released their cheekily-titled debut, Songs For Polar Bears in 1998.

The trio's far-ranging influences bled through on the album which was later hailed by critics as an infectious pop punk racket with a distorted, amp-popping twist. “Basically our favourite bands were poured into it and at the time we were under the influence of American rock – the Pixies, Dinosaur Jr, Soundgarden – but we were listening to My Bloody Valentine and the first Super Furry Animals album too.”

Another album, When It's All Over We Still Have To Clear Up, followed in 2001, but by now the relationship between the band and Jeepster was fraying – a parting of the ways was imminent. “It happened at a strange time,” says Lightbody. “Everybody was into garage rock and there was talk of changing our name to ‘The’ something.”

As the anxiety eased, the band decided to stick with their original title (Lightbody: “The last thing we wanted to do was to change the name and carry on playing Snow Patrol songs”) and began writing Final Straw. In the meantime, Lightbody recorded an album

with his solo project The Reindeer Section, which also included such Scottish luminaries as Idlewild, Arab Strap and Norman Blake of Teenage Fanclub.

Their self-belief soon paid off and, with demos for The Final Straw in circulation, the band were quickly snapped up by Polydor imprint, Fiction and dropped into the studio with techno lynchpin, Garret Lee, aka Jackknife Lee. By now they had picked up an extra guitarist too, former HMV worker, Nathan Connolly (nickname: Handsome. “A passing tramp called him it one day and it’s stuck.”). Having been introduced to the band, Connolly was door stepped until he reluctantly agreed to join. “My mum thought I was being kidnapped by rock stars,” he sighs.

The resulting album has proved to be Snow Patrol’s most head-spinning work to date – a swooping attack of distorted guitar, fizzing drum beats and woozy pop anthems laced with enough heartache to fill an ocean. And with the themes of lost love and the very real horror of the Iraqi conflict influencing Lightbody’s lyrics, The Final Straw is raw emotion made flesh.

“I think it’s the first time I’ve written about something other than my own problems,” says Lightbody. “It was a really scary time and that war impacted on the album. There’s still the theme of relationships on there too, but there’s always been that on Snow Patrol albums. I never write about the nice bits where the relationship starts, it’s always about when the chaos kicks in at the end.”

Final Straw is hair-tingling stuff. Received to wide ranging critical acclaim upon its release last year, its impact was almost immediate. Both singles, Spitting Games and Run were championed by Radio One in the UK. The band, meanwhile, picked up some notable admirers and last year, beardy prog-rockers, Granddaddy took them on a sold out UK tour.

But with a new year comes a new challenge. An NME Brats show occurs in January, before the release of the single ‘Run’ on Jan 26th in the UK. It has already been hailed as a classic, and as talk turns to levels of ubiquity, the band are set to embark on their first US tour where they will be released via the Interscope group. Big things are already expected. “It’s flattering to know that much is expected of us,” says Lightbody. “We just haven’t thought about obtaining that level of success, but that’s not to say we’re not prepared for it, because we are. I just hope that at the end of the day I can still pop down to the supermarket to pick up my milk. I don’t want to get too much hassle.”

But then, Lindy Layton probably expected the same thing.