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BIOGRAPHY

del Amitri

Nearly s even years have passed since a teenage s inger-songwriter named Justin Currie and his band, del Amitri, burst on the Glasgow, Scotland, rock scene with their first single. The band has h ad "our share of ups and downs" since then, Currie says today, but one thing seems certain: with the release of **Waking Hours**, their debut A&M album,, Justin Currie and del Amitri can now look forward to a lot more highs than lows.

Currie was just 16 when he put together the original del Amitri lineup; today, guitarist Iain Harvie is the only other remaining original member. Encouraged by the attention the Glasgow music scene was attracting at the time, del Amitri released their first single, "Sense Sickness," on a local independent label called No Strings in July, 1983.

Road dates in support of such bands as the Smiths and the Fall followed, as well as interest from record labels big and small. Wanting to avoid the short, sharp shock of a major label career, del Amitri opted to sign with Big Star, an offshoot of Chrysalis Records. Their debut album **del Amitri** was released in 1985 with Hugh Jones handling production.

The album was quite well received – one publication called it "a work bristling with the raw, slightly unfocused energies of the early '80s indie scene" –- but it would be unwise to draw comparisons between the del Amitri of five years ago and the del Amitri of today. "The music's changed so much since then that the current band is hardly connected to the old one," says Currie, and one of the things that's changed most is his attitude toward songwriting.

"I got into music because of punkrock --- it was the first really exciting thing I heard when I was young, aside from Bob Dylan and the Beatles," Justin explains. "Punk music also revealed to me how simple rock music was, and that encouraged me to get into it. It was so easy to pick up a guitar and play those songs from the Clash's first album. Or things from America like the Cramps and the Feelies.

"When I first started writing songs, I'd just get everybody from the band together in a room and say, 'Play something.' Then whatever anyone would play, we'd all play to that, and construct these sort of pieces-by-numbers. I'd nominate a certain phrase as being a chorus, and a certain phrase as a verse, and then we'd string them all together and I'd throw words on it. It was pretty slapdash and inarticulate."

After parting company with Big Star and Chrysalis in '86., del Amitri embarked on a two-month "whistle stop" tour of the United States. "We came to the States becase we'd not been there before, and basically we had nothing better to do," Currie says simply. "We had fans who were writing to us so we phoned 'em up and asked if we could stay in their homes in Orlando, or Milwaukee, or Los Angeles, or wherever it happened to be."

Each fan would arrange a local gig, with equipment borrowed from a band in that town, the fan would also provide room and board and arrange interviews with local press and radio stations. "We'd been dealing with a lot of cynical, jaded music business types in England," Currie recalls,

to encounter the kind of genuine enthusiasm for music that we found in the States was an uplifting experience.

"It reminded us of why we'd gotten into it in the first place. These people didn't like things because they were hip, or not like them because they weren't hip. They had no qualms about liking del Amitri along with John Cougar Mellencamp, or the Eagles.

del Amitri signed with A&M about two years ago, when the lineup consisted of Currie and Iain Harvie, guitarist Mick Slaven joined soon thereafter, while Paul Tyagi (drums) and Andy Alston (keyboards) were among the musicians recruited for recording purposes. Production was handled by old friend Hugh Jones (three tracks), Gil Norton (one track), and principally producer-engineer Mark Freegard, whom the band met while working with Jones.

Freegard, Currie says, "had a really refreshing attitude in the studio. He didn't mind taking risks, or doing things that a more puritan engineer wouldn't do. If we wanted to play a guitar through a drainpipe, he was all for it; if we asked for a guitar sound that was 'more brown,' he helped us find it."

As for **Waking Hours**, well, the reviews in the U.K. have already acknowledged that del Amitri is right on track. "A mature, confident record," said one critic. "A sleek belter of a record," said another. "Justin Currie's vividly scripted songs conjure up a cascading flood or resonant images," marrying American influences (from country music to Tom Petty and Television) to a distinctly British point of view.

It may have taken a while for del Amitri to hit their stride. But don't look for them to voice any regrets. "I look at all the time spent playing, making records, and touring as a learning process to get us where we are now," says Justin. "What matters is that we're here, we're enjoying it – and we're making some good music.