

the Sunday MUSIC



SINGER Aston Merrygold reckons his solo career is benefiting from the years he spent in a boyband.



by **COLAN LAMONT**

The 30-year-old shot to fame when JLS finished runners-up to Alexandra Burke on The X Factor in 2008.

Since the lads took a break from the band in 2013, the singer has been trying to make a name for himself in his own right.

The band – Aston, Marvin Humes, JB Gill and Oritse Williams – had four albums and 12 singles, winning Best Song in 2009 at the MOBOs for Beat Again.

He'll perform in Glasgow this week and admits he's feeling better than ever about his music.

Aston says: "I've toured once before on my own and it's great to do it again. I'd say it's even more exciting second time around, because I can change things I wasn't pleased with."

"I love being a creative person and using my own ideas for shows."

"They are family and we speak every day"

"With JLS I had the best time of my life and I'm using everything I learned over the years and putting it into practice in my writing, performing and producing."

"It's great for my growth in the industry and what I want to do. Now I just want to make these shows even better than the last time."

Aston toured Scotland many times with JLS during every year they had together.

He was even once pictured in a Celtic top back in 2009 when he was dating 20-year-old Scot and telly actress Natalia Rush.

The relationship ended after he found fame, but Aston never stopped loving Scotland.

He says: "I've been to Scotland more times than I can count."

"Back when I was with JLS touring, we played places I'd never even heard of in my life."

"I remember our first time in Dumfries and thinking, where are we? Obviously I know Glasgow and Edinburgh well, but we literally hit – dare I say – everywhere in Scotland at one point."

"The crowds there are just very hard to top, no matter where you go

in the UK you'll struggle to find the same noise."

"I always think our shows sounded great but couldn't tell because the crowd was so immense."

Aston played some of Scotland's biggest venues with the band – but he's back to more intimate concerts.

He said: "This time I'm playing Oran Mor and I've never been there before. But I've heard stories about the venue and I'm excited."

"I just can't wait to get back to Glasgow and see if the hype is the same as before."

Aston took part in last year's Strictly Come Dancing – and fans were horrified when he and partner Janette Manrara were eliminated early in the series by judges.

JLS were known for their punishing dance routines as well as their singing and, despite going solo, Aston won't rule out a JLS reunion as he insists they are still best mates and that it's not even a split.

Aston says: "It wasn't just a band for us. Other people split and that's their business but we didn't."

"I'm still in JLS and the boys would say the same thing."

"We just wanted to explore different avenues in the industry and we were still young enough to do that."

"They are family and we speak every day. There's no way we could ever avoid speaking as we've been through so much together."

"In this industry, there's not many people you can trust and who are in your corner going through the same things, it's a new level of friendship."

He adds: "In terms of playing together again, we've always said never say never. There are no plans for it and we're all doing our own thing. Everyone is content with life at the moment but if it ever did happen, the fans would be the first to know because they've all been screaming and shouting about it."

● **Aston plays Oran Mor in Glasgow on April 9.**

My new solo shows are **X**tra special



MAKING MERRY... Aston with JLS, on Strictly and going solo



Oakind

WHERE: Livingston
FOR FANS OF: The 1975, Haim, Bastille
JIM SAYS: Taking his inspiration from West Coast USA, Colin Mckillop unleashed his Oakind project last year to great acclaim.

The 23-year-old played guitar in indie rock bands for a few years, but as a solo artist he's gone down the electronic route.

Leaving his previous band in 2016 he spent over a year working on his new sound in his bedroom. It was a trip to Los Angeles that helped forge his move towards synth-pop.

He said: "I wanted people to listen to the songs and be able to feel that sort of Cali vibe... laid-back, chilled, dreamy. I wanted the songs and me as an artist to ooze sun, palm trees and open spaces – everything I loved about the West Coast. I fell in love with the scenery, the imagery, the glamour."

"The West Coast, that feeling, is literally the foundation of this project. I really wanted that to come across in the music. I wanted it to be soft down, driving through California sort of tracks."

Even the name Oakind is inspired by that part of the world. He added: "I'm a fan of Oakland Raid-



NEW MUSIC

By **Jim Gellatly**

ers in the NFL. That's where I got the idea – combining my love of the West Coast with the team that I follow, who also play there. I wanted everything about this project to relate to that."

Debuting with his track Hold On in November, Clash Magazine described it as a "breezy piece of yacht pop, a bleached out neo-psychedelic gem".

He said: "I had no platform, no coverage before I released it. Having it featured on Clash, Tenement TV and Amazing Radio is really cool considering it was my first release."

"It was great to have people message and say they liked it and that they got the whole mellow vibe I was going for. It vindicated everything I'd be

trying to do. It was a big change for me to go from guitar-driven bands to this. My personal music taste changed massively in that time as well and is way more varied now."

I've had a sneak preview of Oakind's new single Lyf. It's the perfect crossover, combining the best elements of indie and electro-pop. The song is further proof that something special is brewing. The multi-instrumentalist said: "It's maybe a bit more pop than Hold On but still with that dreamy, mellow sound. Bands that are bridging the gap between indie and pop are a big influence for me."

I think it's so cool that bands are starting to push the boundaries of guitar music into pop."

So far Oakind has been a studio project with Colin doing everything. That will change as he focuses on his live debut. He said: "I'm working on a live set-up at the moment and I'll be doing shows this year. I want to put some more songs out first and let it grow a bit before I play live."

Lyf is set to be premiered on Tuesday via Born Music (bornmusiconline.com).

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● Jim presents a weekly showcase of New Music on Amazing Radio Sundays 2-4pm.

amazingradio.com
jimgellatly.com

▶ Watch a video of the band playing at: www.thescottishsun.co.uk