

Great playing from country to country

COUNTRY singer Phil Vassar still can't believe he has thousands of Scottish fans.



by **COLAN LAMONT**

The 53-year-old is used to being a star in America, but is always shocked by the reaction he gets when he performs in Glasgow or Edinburgh.

And despite more than 20 years in the country music business, it's something he doesn't think he'll ever get used to.

Phil says: "We've played Scotland quite a few times – I remember my first gig was King Tut's in Glasgow.

"Last time it was Edinburgh and it felt pretty good to be a tourist.

"It was real pretty and now I'm pumped up and excited to get back over there to Scotland.

"Although I've played there several times, this is the first time I've ever put on a tour featuring different cities in the UK at one time.

No language barrier

"Recently it's been the Country To Country gigs in Glasgow.

"I'm surprised that anybody anywhere in the world likes us.

"When we go to Scotland I suppose there's no language barrier.

"But even when we go to Italy or Germany they are singing the songs too, and that's great.

"I'll never get used to it."

Phil, whose self-titled debut album produced five hit singles in the US 18 years ago, admits travelling so much is a huge perk – but he never gets to stay somewhere long enough to get more fans outside.

The singer adds: "It's a blessing to play all over the planet.

"The States is so big that you can play all over there and never leave it, but for me it's so much more fun to experience other cultures.

"When we come to Scotland, it's a special occasion. But, ideally, I'd love to come a couple times a year, just to build the fan base.

"Lots of guys go over once and never again but for me it's about going every year more than once.

"We like to experience the cities we

are in and make memories." Phil made his name in the late 1990s writing songs for legendary country singers such as Tim McGraw and he was considered one of the best in the business.

During that time, he wanted to make it on his own and started to record his own music.

After releasing his own first album, he started touring and realised he preferred playing overseas.

Phil says: "I think fans are more educated in the UK, they seem to know music better.

"While in America, it's more about the party.

"I noticed that in Scotland and the UK they really want to just hear your songs and music.

"They don't want to just get drunk and scream and pass out, they want to hear it for real.

"Over there it's a whole different vibe."

Phil likes his shows to be interactive so fans feel involved.

He adds: "I never have a set list so just play what people call out to me. "It could just be a free-for-all, which is exciting.

"What's so funny is people call out all these old songs and that excites me because I get to dig deep into the catalogue I don't get to play often.

"It's challenging because it's not like it's the same songs to play over and over again.

"I feel it makes it fresh and unique, like I'm living on the edge a little bit and out of my comfort zone. That's when you play best."

But Phil admits his tactics are a walk on the wild side because he might not remember the words of any song the fans suggest.

He said: "I struggle to remember my hits sometimes, it's part of the talent of playing live. But it's OK – everyone else knows them."

● Phil Vassar is playing the O2 ABC in Glasgow on April 18

colan.lamont@the-sun.co.uk



PHILLING HIS BOOTS . . . Vassar can't get enough of playing on tour



THE SEA ATLAS

WHERE: Uig, Isle of Lewis

FOR FANS OF: Frightened Rabbit, Ben Howard, Snow Patrol

JIM SAYS: In the isolation of his family's Hebridean croft, Calum Buchanan — aka The Sea Atlas — has been beaver away to create some wonderfully heartfelt songs.

The 25-year-old returned to Lewis last year after five years at uni in Aberdeen, specialising in oil and gas. He explained: "When I graduated I was hunting for a job in the oil industry, while working in a record shop.

"I started to take stock of what I really wanted from life. Yeah, a big salary would be great, but I knew I was happiest back home on the island, surfing, working the croft and doing boat work... living on island time.

"After a rough relationship and with no grad schemes in the oil industry, I loaded up my Land Rover with guitars and surfboards and drove back in the middle of winter. I've not looked back."

Calum set about creating a home studio in a cabin on the croft. He first started playing under The Sea Atlas name for beer money at uni. For a while it was a band, but now it's just him. He said:



NEW MUSIC

By Jim Gellatly

"It sort of ran its course, just growing up and people having different commitments. But it's always been my project, so I just kept the name for this rebranded version of The Sea Atlas. Like the new Irn-Bru recipe but without the controversy."

Setting up his own label, Lost Volcano Records, he released the seven-track Dreams EP last September. He said: "I made it that winter when I moved back to the island. You can hear the wind, rain and hail batter the tin roof of my cabin in places!"

A new EP from The Sea Atlas is due out next month. He's just released the first single from it, Ripped Jeans. Calum said: "It's a bit more rocky than what I've done previously, sort of Foals

crossed with Stereophonics. That song and the rest of the EP are more of a departure lyrically from the stereotypical singer-songwriter theme of 'You're so gorgeous, love me, love me!'

"It's more of a 'Hey it didn't work, it all made me a bit of a mess, it's time to move on' vibe! It was all recorded back in my studio with old school gear and lots of valve equipment, so it sounds really warm. Then I mixed it with Pete Fletcher at Black Bay Studios, which is this amazing new facility on the island. Pete did a really great job of taking what I made and just raised it to a whole new level."

Though Calum writes and records alone, he is joined live by his friends Niall Masson on guitar and bass, drummer DC Macmillan and Paul Martin on guitar, bass, piano and samples. They play The Cellar in Aberdeen on Thursday, Edinburgh's Sneaky Pete's on Friday, and Saturday at The Hug And Pint in Glasgow. He added: "I also look after a flock of sheep on the croft. We should have some new-born lambs in the next couple of weeks, so probably not the best time to be heading on tour."

MORE: facebook.com/the.sea.atlas
● 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