

'I'm a wife who still drinks quite a bit'

With her hippy upbringing, rock 'n' roll lifestyle and sunny disposition, Devon Sproule is a musical charmer, as **Tamzin Lewis** writes.

Devon Sproule



Some lives are naturally cinematic and Devon Sproule's definitely lends itself to pictures.

Born in a Canadian hippy commune called Dandelion, she grew up in the Twin Oaks Community eco-village in Virginia. Devon dropped out of high school, got spotted busking in the street and released her first album aged 16.

She says: "Twin Oaks encouraged you to do what you want to do rather than to make money. People don't make an income there, so you don't grow up with money worries hanging over your head. It is a place where you live simply, but unless you hate where you grow up, you tend to love it."

Devon, 29, describes leaving high school in a "pretty responsible way," to study at community college. And then in a version of the classic busking story she says: "I met some cool people while playing on the street in Charlottesville who wanted to help me out. I started

playing proper gigs and the first record came out."

She adds: "I think with music there is no structure like in a lot of jobs. You don't really go to school to become a performing musician so you just have to do it. One of the people I met early on who helped me and influenced me musically was the guy I ended up marrying."

Devon's other half is singer-songwriter Paul Curreri, who she married in 2005, celebrating the nuptials with her fourth record, *Keep Your Silver Shined*.

She says of being married to Paul: "It is great because we have the same management and label so can work with a lot of the same musicians and overlap with schedules. We have collaborated but mostly we have done our own thing."

Devon recorded three albums prior to getting married, two as a teenager, with her third, *Upstate Songs*, acting as her breakthrough. She is known for her rootsy, folkie, jazz-infected pop songs; musical snapshots which are whimsical,

witty and elegant.

She says: "My first record, *Devon*, wasn't my best, but you have to start somewhere. Some people get attached to my first records and you have to let people have their own relationships with your music. Often I get requests from one of the first two albums which is nice."

Devon's sixth studio record, *I Love You, Go Easy*, has just been released by Tin Angel Records based in Coventry. The album was recorded in her birthplace Ontario with Canadian band The Slit who Devon describes as "handsome, rebellious, emotional geeks".

As always, her songs are about relationships and while writing this album her friend Danele died after a long illness, which Devon says was "heartbreaking and enlightening".

"My records are the next chapter of life in general," she says. "It's a combination of day and night, domestic stuff and rock 'n' roll. I have been writing about the

pleasures of the physical world, but also accepting the world beyond.

"One review called it still-life art pop which maybe wasn't meant as a complement but I kind of liked it anyway. It's not quite as rootsy as the last couple of records and part of that is because it was recorded with a new band who are more experimental. It is still melodic and beautiful but it is slightly strange."

Devon's music often has a breezy 1930s-40s jazz swing style, but who are her current influences?

"I've seen David Byrne recently, and like a lot of the musicians on my label. I have also been a fan of Lucinda Williams for ages and saw her perform in the North East.

"I met her right before she got married. She had a raucous life before marriage but has blossomed into a wifey-gal these days. We are both wives who still drink quite a bit, so there is still bubbly good stuff and late nights."

She is soon to hit Berlin with the late

nights as she plans to move to Germany later this year "to solidify the European circuit".

She says: "It's the cheapest place to stay and it's not a crazy, intimidating city. I have only spent a few days there but I like all the cool graffiti and sculptures. The arts is really bubbling up."

And would she ever return to a commune? "When I get among my most apocalyptic friends we talk about it. I think I might, but I don't think my husband would, so that might be a problem. It's harder to make a living in music if you are based in the middle of nowhere."

"You can't really isolate yourself until you are good and famous."

* Devon Sproule is on the *Cosmos Stage of the Intro Festival* on June 5. She also plays *Hall Two of The Sage Gateshead* on June 2, www.thesagegateshead.org *I Love You, Go Easy* is out now on Tin Angel Records.

INTRO

Change of name for music fest signals a new dawn

It's back with a blast on June 5, boasting 10 hours of music, a storming line-up – and a new name.

Middlesbrough Music Live – just named by a national newspaper as one of the best festivals of the summer – has been re-named INTRO festival, opening doors to all sorts of future possibilities.

The idea behind the name change is to cast a new light on the festival, give it a modern feel and allow organisers to introduce attractions such as comedy, cinema, street theatre and performance art.

The emphasis is still on live music of course, with this year's hot list – a mix of more than 80 international and local bands – including Fun Lovin' Criminals from the USA, London rapper Chipmunk and The Chapman Family from Teesside.

Another change this year is an admission charge. While early birds offers have been available, the standard price is £15 for adults and £5 for under 13s. But that price might well rise in the run-up to the event.

Organised by Middlesbrough Council and promoters Ten Feet Tall, the festival will play out across a dozen stages in the town centre with other big names including Example, Feeder, Wretch 32, Darwin Deez and We are the



Chipmunk