

# New Zealand's top act to play The Warwick

BY SINEAD MCGOVERN

IT SEEMS we've been getting the pronunciation of her name wrong since we fell in love with her more than two years ago, but New Zealand songstress Bic Runga doesn't seem to mind.

It's not pronounced Bic, as in the biro, but 'Bec'; "I suppose it's a little like the rest of the world pronouncing Bono like Bone-o," she laughed, while speaking to the *Galway Advertiser* from London last week.

She is currently in the middle of a 32-date UK and Irish tour which will culminate in appearances at Oxegen and The V Festival in England, and she plays The Warwick on Sunday night.

The stunningly beautiful singer is from Christchurch in New Zealand's South Island, but she can thank her Chinese mother and Maori father for her unique good-looks. She is a mega-star in New Zealand, and is by far the country's best selling artist, with her first two albums, *Drive* (1999) and *Beautiful Collision* (2002) going 18 times platinum between them.

Her latest album *Birds*, released here on Monday, also shot straight to the number one slot there. But because New Zealand is such a small

country, she far from considers herself a superstar, and talked in awe about other artists she met the last time she played at Oxegen in 2004.

"The Strokes were in the room next to mine in the hotel - they got a lot of presents! - and I kept meeting The Kings of Leon in the elevator," she said.

I told her that she is a pretty big star herself in Ireland, and she admits that after basing herself in France for a year after releasing *Beautiful Collision* in Europe, Ireland was the main country to pick up on her music, and take to her singing style.

The drive to conquer the world she seemed to have then, seems to be a little lost in her now. When I ask her if living in Paris worked out well for her, if she managed to do as well in other parts of Europe as here, she said; "Well sort of, but not really. It went alright. There is only so much I can do really. I did a lot of gigs, that's what I like doing the most anyway. I'm not looking for a shortcut to stardom."

The change in attitude, and the change of style to be heard on *Birds*, may be attributed to events in her personal life in the last year, namely the loss of her father. He died last summer, and most of the work on *Birds* was



Bic Runga plays The Warwick this Sunday night.

carried out after his death.

"The album is on the melancholy side, it was made in the shadow of my father's death," she said. She said the whole time proved very motivational for her artistically; "It made me drop the fear, and stop looking for 'that hit' all the time.

"It's not an overtly pop album, there's no particular hit single on it, it's more like one, whole, cohesive piece. It's a very calming, comforting record, like the

kind of feeling you get when you're taking a bath," she said.

Reviews of the album are earning Bic a lot of comparisons with her mother, who was a lounge singer in Malaysia in the sixties. How does she feel about being compared to her mother?

"I kind of like it," she said, after some consideration. "It's not the kind of thing you like to hear when you're a teenager, but it's different when you're a 30 year old

woman. I mean it's inevitable, I'm going to turn into my mother!"

"The music she sang was romantic lounge songs, and I think they're really the ultimate template for love songs."

Bic is from quite the musical family actually. Her older sister Boh is in a band called Stellar who have also enjoyed number one status in New Zealand, and her younger sister Pearl, who Bic says is actually the best singer of the three, is a national school teacher by day, but has also been in a couple of musical outfits.

So what now for the youngest of the Rungas? What hopes does she have for *Birds*? An album which is said to be a world apart from her previous work, and which one reviewer said is "darker and scuzzier sounding, as if it were an original '60s session tape rediscovered in an old suitcase."

"I just hope that it will move people," she said. "and that people will bring it into their lives. I often think about music, and its usefulness, and I just hope that it will serve a purpose in people's day-to-day lives."

She is looking forward to playing Ireland, she says. She spent a month recording in Cork when she was just 20,

and the soda bread bug bit her bad.

Home for the minute is Auckland, but a move to London may be on the cards. Is the larger European and American market still in her sights? I reminded her of an interview she gave to the *New Zealand Herald* in 2003 in which she said; "In America it's trying to fit a square peg in a round hole... aesthetically I don't quite get it and the feeling is mutual - they don't quite get me either."

"I reckon I have as much chance of cracking America as I do of dying in a plane crash," she told me. "It's so hard to break the American market, only a very small amount of people manage it. If it is meant for me, if it's fate, it will happen. But it's not something I'm anxious about."

Supporting her on her Irish tour will be New Zealand outfit The Devastations, one of whom, also plays on *Birds*. But alas, Neil Finn of Crowded House fame, who also plays on the album, could not take part in the Irish UK tour, although he did join her for a jaunt around New Zealand and Australia.

Tickets for Bic Runga are available from Redlight Records, Mulligans, and The Róisín Dúbh.

## Bluesman Chaz De Paolo brings his eclectic impressions to Cuba\*

BY KEVIN MCGUIRE

OVER THE past 10 years New Jersey guitar virtuoso Chaz De Paolo has very much become an adopted son of Galway. However he grew up just a few minutes from Manhattan and was very much influenced by Broadway during the early years of his life.

When De Paolo heard AC/DC's *Back In Black* as a teen his mind was made up that it was a musicians life for him. From there he became more and more interested in the electric guitar and almost wore out every Hendrix, Jeff Beck, Stevie Ray, and Buddy Guy record he owned. By his early twenties Chaz began to be recognized as an exceptionally gifted guitar player. On his frequent trips to Ireland over the past decade he has wowed audiences again and again. So, his upcoming appearance at Cuba\* on Wednesday is not to be missed.

Chaz released his most recent album *Flirtin' With The Blues* late last year and it was his first on influential blues label 95 North Records (home of Pinetop Perkins

and others). The album was a big favourite with us here at the *Galway Advertiser* and other music writers took to it also.

"The reviews for *Flirtin' With The Blues* have been very favourable," Chaz tells me. "Dave Scott from *Blues Matters* in England is quoted as saying I could be 'the future of 21st century blues music!' He went as far as saying I have a soulful voice. I have always been very concerned about my singing. I do not believe it is a strong point of mine."

Many people will disagree with Chaz on that point but Chaz is certainly more confident about his excellent and unique style of guitar playing. It seems a follow up to *Flirtin' With The Blues* is not too far around the corner.

"The band and I have been culling through material for the acoustic release," says Chaz. "My original idea for *Flirtin' Acoustic* was to be an acoustic EP, of say five or seven tracks. It was to include a few tracks performed acoustically from the electric release with two new tracks. However it now looks as though it will be a full length CD. A lot of people do not know about my

acoustic side or my bottle neck playing that I have been working on. So I'm going to change all that with this new album."

With each album Chaz reaches out to the audience a little bit more. As a live performer his reach is somewhat extended. *Fly* magazine in America reported that Chaz is "one of those guitarists whose bicep measurement is actually relevant to the kind of music he makes - muscular, working-man's blues". It is this working-man blues ethos that has brought Chaz to the attention of many of his musical heroes.

In recent years he has been invited to tour alongside British blues legends The Groundhogs - the backing group for John Lee Hooker in the 1960s whom he dubbed "the number one British blues band". In recent years The Groundhogs have been named as one of the top 5 trios of all time by *Uncut*.

"Playing with The Groundhogs is outrageous!" says Chaz. "When I finish my tour in Ireland I will be off to Bristol to start recording with them and preparing for an upcoming tour in October. We will be co-headlining the Bristol Blues Festival

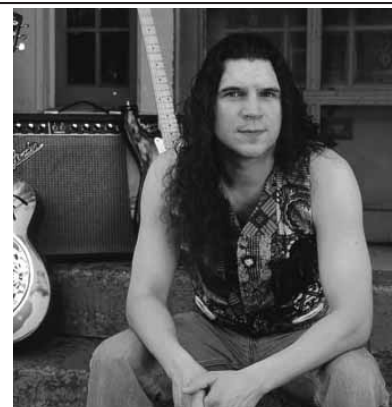
in October with Otis Taylor."

Chaz is a lifelong fan of the late John Lee Hooker and touring with The Groundhogs has given him some unique insights into the 'Boom Boom' man.

"The Groundhogs have some great stories about Hooker," says Chaz. "One thing I didn't know until now is that he had a speech impediment and stuttered quite a lot. I also found out that if he didn't like what the Hogs were doing live he would fire them on stage and then re-hire them by the end of the show! That's real rock'n'roll stuff!"

There is no doubt that his work with The Groundhogs is a major career highlight for Chaz. Yet one career moment that he will always treasure is being invited to open for blues legend Buddy Guy at Galway Arts Festival big top in 2003. The organizers were looking for an opening act to set the tone for Guy and thanks to the intervention of Redlight Records supremo Des Hubbard the job was offered to Chaz.

"Without doubt my best career memory is opening for my idol Buddy Guy," says Chaz. "Galway is a very special place to me and Galwegians



Chaz De Paolo

have treated me as one of their own. It is mainly because of the good people of Galway that all my musical dreams have come true. It is a nice feeling when I walk into Des Hubbard's shop and he says 'Welcome home.' Every time I visit Galway people come up to me and say 'It's good to have you back.' That feels really great!"

It will be good to have Chaz De Paolo back among us. For Chaz it is all about slinging his guitar over his shoulder and getting in front of an audience. "I just want to keep playing and making people happy when they see me play," he says. "Life does not get much better than that."

Doors are at 8.30pm. Support is from Tom Portman. Tickets are €10 and are available from Bar 903 and Redlight Records.

