

Julian Dawson

Biography

On July 4th 1954, the day Elvis Presley first got together with Scotty and Bill at Sun Studios in Memphis, Julian Dawson came into the world in London, England. He grew up in Kent as one of seven brothers, had nine misspent years at two Catholic boarding schools which ended when he was expelled the day before his 17th birthday. After a year spent working, he went on to study Fine Art and Printmaking at Exeter Art College.

With solo performances and an increasingly popular 'Art School Band', he soon realized that singing suited him much better than painting and he joined his first professional band, planning to play for the US forces in Germany. With the example of the Beatles firmly in mind, he left England overnight to start rehearsals in Frankfurt. It soon became clear that there was no scope for original material, so Julian left to see what the rest of Germany had to offer.

After a move back to England, the next few years saw a lengthy period of learning his trade, touring all over Europe with his various band line-ups, which eventually led to a pub-rock influenced first LP, *Let Out The Pig*. Realizing that the energy he was spending on keeping a Transit van alive would be better spent making a good record, Julian began working at the Can Studio near Cologne on tracks which led to 'The Flood' project with Rosko Gee (Traffic) and Jaki Liebezeit (from Can). An early 12" on Rough Trade was followed by two highly acclaimed albums on Polydor: *As Real As Disneyland* and *Luckiest Man In The Western World*, with studio guests Richard Thompson, PP Arnold and Toots Thielemans. Excellent reviews internationally and 'album of the month' status in Germany added to the growing interest in Europe.



America had always been a goal and 1990 saw Julian's first stateside release – the CD *Live On The Radio* on Watermelon Records in Austin, Texas. Regular song-writing trips to the US followed and when Julian signed with BMG/Ariola, he used his newly-acquired contacts to record 1991's *Fragile As China* in Nashville with Garry Tallent (E Street Band) producing and a host of stellar guests including Vince Gill, Michael Henderson, Jerry Douglas and Dr. Hook's Dennis Locorriere. The first single *How Can I Sleep Without You* went straight into the German charts, helped by four months of high-profile touring as special guest of that country's most popular band BAP.



With the new line-up featuring Rodney Crowell alumni Stuart Smith and Vince Santoro, Julian had two highly successful European tours (preserved on the BMG live



CD *June Honeymoon*) and in the Autumn of 1992, was back with Garry Tallent in the studio for follow-up album *Headlines*, his regular band augmented by guests Duane Eddy, Jo-el Sonnier, Dan Penn, Bill Payne, Steve Forbert and vocal group 14 Karat Soul. On the back of the accapella single *Sunday Into Saturday Night* the album was released in the UK on Arista, with further lengthy spells of touring.

BMG preserved ten years of 'turntable hits' on the 1994 compilation *How Human Hearts Behave*, with statutory extra tracks specially recorded in New York with producer Stewart Lerman. A stand-out ballad version of *How Can I Sleep Without You* as a duet with Lucinda Williams and two songs with the Roches, accompanied the selection of singles, live tracks and re-mixes that made up the rest of the collection.

In spring 1994 Julian was ready with another batch of songs, recorded this time at Dreamland Studios in Woodstock, New York. With the accent very much on his own fine group of players the album still featured co-writes and collaborations with Nicky Hopkins, Jules Shear and Willie Nile, whilst the Roches and Curtis Stigers contributed vocals. *Travel On* was released in the German territories and N. America in early 1995 and in the UK a year later.

Besides his own albums Julian has recorded five CDs with Iain Matthews' Plainsong, a project in which all four members contribute material. Julian later left the group to concentrate on his own projects but reunited with Plainsong for a '40th Anniversary Farewell Tour' in summer 2012.



Summer 1996 saw his first production job, for country legend Charlie Louvin's (+) comeback album *The Longest Train*. The CD included three of Julian's songs, new versions of six Louvin Brothers classics and a great line-up of Nashville country rockers and guest vocalists.

The following years saw him performing solo and with Plainsong all over Europe and North America with tours in Holland, Germany, Austria, Denmark and Switzerland, UK tours with Fairport Convention, Dolores Keane and Al Stewart and three weeks of duets with the wonderful Katy Moffatt.

In 1997 Julian was back in the studio in New York City to record the almost acoustic *Move Over Darling* (on Fledg'ling in the UK, Compass in N. America and SPV in Germany) with long-time partner Steuart Smith and with return visits from Richard Thompson, Dan Penn and the Roches.



1999's *Under The Sun* was Julian's first album recorded on English soil. He stepped back to the beginnings of his career and put together a band comprising two of his oldest friends in the music business, ex-Soft Boys Kimberley Rew and Andy Metcalfe. The American influence of recent years, was represented by multi-talented Nashville resident Daniel Tashian and the record reflected Dawson's growing passion for simplicity and soulfulness in his songwriting, sounding traditional and modern at

the same time. Julian's children Robyn and Holly sang harmony, while legendary piano player and Who sideman John 'Rabbit' Bundrick guested on several tracks.

2001 was a milestone year. Julian celebrated twenty-five years on stage with another live CD, *Cologne Again Or* featuring stripped-down versions of some of his favourite songs (supported again by Andy Metcalfe, Kimberley Rew and Katy Moffatt) and his busiest concert schedule for years – highlighted by appearances at the Tonder Festival in Denmark and the prestigious Newport Folk Festival in the USA.

He spent the summer in California recording with ex-Byrds legend Gene Parsons playing almost all the instruments. The resulting *Hillbilly Zen* was released in February 2002, on three labels: in Germany, the USA and in the UK. Julian subsequently toured with Gene to promote the album, both in the States and at home. Low points of the year included Julian's bout with breast cancer and five nights spent on the floor of a Salvation Army church in Newfoundland, where he was stranded along with 10,000 other passengers on 9/11, an experience he documented in his adaptation from Jimmy Rogers, 'Waiting For A Plane'.



Bedroom Suite followed in 2004: Almost a concept album, with eight of the songs concerning aspects of courtship and marriage; Julian recorded at home with a handful of guests, mostly friends and family (his 19 year-old daughter Holly sings a duet with Dad!) The release was supported by over 50 shows all over Europe.

An idea that had been brewing for a long time came to fruition in 2006, when Julian released *Nothing Like A Dame*, his first album of covers: fifteen favourite songs originally written or sung by women, reinterpreted in a simple acoustic setting with guitarist Richard Kennedy and special guest Martin Carthy. (First appearance of the famous kilt in the Dawson family tartan!).

Another long-discussed project was realised when Julian went in with producer and soul legend Dan Penn to record *Deep Rain* in 2008. Working with a hand-picked team of Nashville friends in Dan's own vintage basement studio, he came up with what is considered one of his best song collections, (several co-written with Dan Penn) on his fourth album for Blue Rose Records. With a band offering recorded, Julian decided it was time to take a full band out on tour again for the first time in years, and the fine line-up was captured on the imaginatively titled '*Julian Dawson & Band: Live*' double CD / DVD which came out in 2010, again on Blue Rose.



2010 also saw the publication of Julian's first book, a lovingly researched biography of piano-player extraordinaire Nicky Hopkins, with whom Julian wrote and recorded on his *Travel On* album in 1994, the year of Nicky's tragically early death. The first version published came out in Germany in well-known media figure Elke Heidenreich's imprint through Random House, (who chose the title, '*Nicky Hopkins: Eine Rock Legende*'). English language versions followed in spring 2011: a sumptuous hardback in the UK and a beautifully put-together paperback version in

North America, both titled '*And On Piano...Nicky Hopkins*'. The book received glowing 4 star reviews in the music press and made the 'Top Ten Books Of The Year' lists in 'Uncut' and 'Shindig' magazines.

Julian's songs have been recorded by artists such as Rosie Flores, Charlie Louvin, Rock Salt and Nails and Sean Keane, while Julian himself has appeared as singer or harmonica player with Gerry Rafferty, Glen Tilbrook, Del Amitri, Dan Penn, Iain Matthews, Richard Thompson, Benny Hill (!!) and many others (see Discography for details).

With a growing and highly appreciative audience in many countries and positive reactions at radio and in the rock, folk and country music press, Julian Dawson remains an original voice, touring and performing with undiminished vigour and continuing to chart a cheerfully eclectic course through the contemporary music scene.

What spare time he has, is spent with his family, listening to music, collecting vinyl rarities, walking, writing and simply enjoying life.

