



Faithless: Why music matters to Maxi Jazz

"I've been ready to stop for the last five years," admits Faithless frontman and lyricist Maxi Jazz.

"I don't want to be the one dragging myself on stage and everybody is looking at their watch."

From any other performer, this would rank as an unexpectedly candid statement. But when you speak to Max "Maxi Jazz" Frazer (pictured right, in centre), you quickly realise that his famously laidback style of rapping (more of that later) is matched by his relaxed and open demeanour.

"I'll tell you what's kept the band together for so long," he continues. "The fans. The fact that people still come out in their droves to see us is what keeps us out there."

And come out in their droves is exactly what Faithless fans do, as evidenced by the hugely successful dance band's current UK tour, which takes in the country's larger arenas.

Buddhist world view

But it wasn't always this way. During its first year of release, and before DJs picked up on second single *Insomnia*, the dance outfit's debut album *Reverence* sold only 4000 copies around the world.

Prior to the formation of Faithless, the band's other key personnel, Rollo Armstrong and Alayah "Sister Bliss" Bentovim, had a successful career producing house singles with a succession of different vocalists.

Frazer was one such vocalist. "I'm Buddhist, so I look at the world very differently. Rollo was intrigued so he sat me down and questioned me about it. And he was like, 'Can you put that in a song?'"

Unbeknown to Frazer, he soon became part of Armstrong's wider plan. "He wanted to make an album, which he'd never done before, that was like a mix tape. But he wanted a vocalist to front the entire album, rather than having a different vocalist on each track.

"And he was thinking, 'Here's this Buddhist rapper. I haven't heard of one of them before, I'll use him.'"

"So that was that, Faithless was formed."

Inspired by a radio

The band has since released another four studio albums, along with a chart-topping greatest hits collection. Their current single, *Music Matters*, will hopefully be the latest in a string of almost 20 top 40 hits.

The song, explains Frazer, was partly inspired by a radio that his mother gave him when he was seven years old.

"I never went anywhere except school without the radio," he says. "The song's basically about the amount of inspiration it's possible to glean, especially as a young person, from music."

As with many of the band's best-loved songs, you can't confuse *Music Matters* as being by anyone but Faithless, thanks to Frazer's unmistakable vocals.

"I nicked it really," he happily admits of his understated style of rapping. "I was like most rappers when I started and then I heard [hugely influential rapper] Rakim and he just blew me away completely.

"It struck me immediately when I was listening to him that, if you yell at somebody, people tend to move away from you to get away from your perceived aggression.

"Whereas if you talk really quite quietly, people want to hear what you're saying. Rakim's beautiful, laidback conversational style just washed over me."

Since the formation of Faithless, Frazer says he has had: "Highlight after highlight. I have seen some things that I never in my wildest imagination thought that I would see."

Playing to "nearly 100,000 people just jumping up and down like one person" at Glastonbury 2002 was one such moment. And performing gigs in countries like South Africa and Russia is, he says, staggering.

"When you get on stage, you forget all about global communication and think, 'How does the crowd know the words? You live miles away from my house'."

Faithless are currently on tour across the UK. Their single Music Matters is out now.

To watch the videos for some of Faithless's biggest hits, including *Insomnia*, *Mass Destruction* and *We Come 1*, check out the music section on BT Vision's on demand service.



My BT Vision

Ready to buy?
Get BT Vision

Order now

Log in with your BT.com Username and Password

Name

Password

Remember me

Register with the site

- Hear about new services first
- Keep in touch