

Crackerjack

Music

Javier Moreno

This Barcelona-born singer-songwriter and guitarist, now based in Bristol, launches his new EP *Bad Woman* with this show at the Folk House.

Moreno fuses Spanish and Latin styles for an enticing, inimitable brew. **Javier Moreno plays Bristol Folk House tomorrow (Fri). Tickets are priced £8 adv and available by ringing 0117 926 2987.**

Senser

These politically-charged Londoners are pretty hard to pin down musically, but rap-rock still seems closest to the mark.

They've been around the block a few times in their 20 years and have always had a strong live following.

For the last few months, the band have been collaborating with drum and bass producers Dean Rodell and Current Value. New material is apparently on the way.

Senser play the O2 Academy Bristol on Sunday, June 20. Tickets are priced £9 adv and available by ringing 0844 477 2000.

Roxy Magic

Bristol's Roxy Magic – a top drawer tribute to Roxy Music and Bryan Ferry – play a fundraising show for Help For Heroes on Saturday in Thornbury. The band are fronted by former soldier Kevin Hackett, who saw active service in the Falklands and Gulf war.

Roxy Magic play the Armstrong Hall, Thornbury, on Saturday, June 19. Tickets are priced £10 adv or £10 on the door. For details, ring 01454 412103.

Lau



This formidable trio are one of the most celebrated folk acts in the country. They've won the hotly-contested Best Group gong at the Radio 2 Folk Awards for three years running and released their second album, *Arc Light*, in March.

Their 2007 debut *Lightweights and Gentlemen* was a heady mix of freewheeling instrumentals and reworked versions of traditional tunes including Ewan MacColl's *Freeborn Man*.

Arc Light sees them pushing on with their sound even further, this time adding pedal steel guitar.

Lau play the Bristol Folk House on Saturday, June 19. Tickets are priced £12 adv and available by ringing 0117 926 2987.

You can call me Al

STEVE HARNELL talks exclusively to soul superstar and preacher Al Green ahead of his hotly-anticipated new tour

Has there ever been an artist who more perfectly embodies that age-old battle between the body and the spirit than the mighty Al Green?

The Arkansas-born legend sold more than 20 million records of his "lover man" brand of sensual soul in the early Seventies before retiring from the limelight to become a preacher at the Full Gospel Tabernacle in Memphis in 1976.

But throughout all those years out of the music business, his songs endured. Classic hits such as *Tired of Being Alone*, *Let's Stay Together* and *Take Me to the River* sound as fresh now as the day they were minted.

Throughout the Eighties and Nineties he continued to release Gospel albums, but the sexy R&B that allowed him to join the pantheon of greats such as Marvin Gaye, Aretha Franklin and Otis Redding seemed like a thing of the past.

Green cites an assault from former girlfriend Mary Woodson White, who threw a pan of boiling grits over the star, and an accident on stage in Texas in the mid-Seventies as messages from God to change his ways.

So is it Reverend Green or Al on the end of the transatlantic phoneline when we catch up with the singer?

"Does it change day by day?!" he laughs. "I guess it'll have to be just plain old Al at the moment."

Green's on the line to talk about his co-headlining tour with singer Michael McDonald, which visits the UK this month.

It's the latest chapter in Al's career which saw him return to his soul roots in 2003 for the tellingly-titled album *I Can't Stop*.

Everything's OK followed two years later and his last studio album saw him working with a new breed of soul stars and hip-hopper Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson of The Roots.

"That was *Lay It Down*," Al explains. "And we also got together with John Legend, Corinne Bailey Rae and Anthony Hamilton for that record. We're gonna sing some of that when we come to see you!"

"I liked the sound that those guys from Philadelphia and New York came up with in the studio – it was fantastic."

"We recorded it at Jimi Hendrix's place in New York called Electric

Lady. The whole room has a very mystical type of vibe – I guess it's because Jimi used to sleep there overnight all the time. I used to hang out in the studios for days – it has a real history to it."

Lay It Down manages to pull off the very tricky task of sounding contemporary while still offering up that classic Seventies soul feel of Al's most famous songs.

"Did you hear that? I heard it, too," he chuckles. "The guys who worked with me on it wanted to be it different but they also wanted to play it the same, if you know what I mean."

"It felt good in the studio. We just went in and got the job done really professionally. We cut a lot more tracks than we realised in the end. It got to about 15 or 16 when somebody piped up 'we got enough songs now. You can stop!'"

"Lots of people have told me that this kind of music is timeless. We have all the age ranges coming to our shows, from the older and middle-aged fans to the little bitty ones. They're all singing along with me [Al bursts into a quick snatch of *Let's Stay Together*]... I'm so in love with you!"

"I go to the mall and I can hear little kids tugging at their moms shouting 'hey, it's Al Green!' These little ones weren't even born when *Let's Stay Together* came out."

"I asked one recently where he heard it and he told me it was in his mom's SUV. They're growing up with it. Little kids don't lie."

"We're gonna do *Lay it Down* and *By The Sea* from the new album in the show then we slam straight into *Everything's Gonna Be Alright*. I start pulling out roses and throwing

them into the crowd. You should see everyone tussling over them, 'it's mine! it's mine!' It's great fun."

While Al's early-Seventies classics will no doubt appear in the setlist, for an artist who has now been around for more than 40 years, he has the luxury of being able to play newer songs without half of the audience heading sheepishly to the bar.

"You gotta hear this band," he adds. "They really play like they belong in that spot that they're in. I love all the kind of Al Jackson and Willie Mitchell funk that we did and these guys nail it. We've got a classic sound here. Why jump off a winning horse, right?"

And it seems like it was good old people power which persuaded the singer to get back on stage rather than restricting his performances just to the pulpit.

"I remember coming out of a gas station with a steaming hot cup of coffee smoking in my hand and people were asking 'when's the new



Soul legend Al Green co-headlines a series of shows with Michael McDonald; inset, Green's classic 1972 album *Let's Stay Together*

stuff coming out?" Al muses. "Some people back home pretend like they don't know who Al Green is, then they sidle up to me and give me a little burst of *Tired of Being Alone*..."

With Green jetting off on regular tours around the world, he's keen that his flock don't go without some spiritual enrichment while he's away.

"We've got five preachers at the church who take it in turns. If I know I'll be gone for a few weeks, people help out in my place," he added.

"I know though that sometimes people don't come to hear the preaching, they just want to see Al Green. Some of them say 'we've just been to Graceland and come to check you out, too'."

"There's no sense in being two or three people. You are who you are and if you've been given some gifts then it's a shame if you don't use them."

"It's really wonderful to hear the when the choir and musicians are really laying it down. Just last Sunday was fantastic. It was electrifying."

But it's not all been roses and encores for Green while he's been playing live recently.

The new year saw his producer,

long-time friend and mentor Willie Mitchell pass away. It was Mitchell who guided Al to success with his early albums and who was a key component in establishing the singer's distinctive Gospel-tinged sound.

"It was very difficult. We were in Australia when we heard the news," Green explains. "It was still eight or nine days before we could get back to Atlanta and then travel on to Memphis."

"I've known him for 37 years – it was tough news to take. You don't just put that kind of friendship in a bag and throw it away."

"When I started out it was Willie who kept telling me to sing like Al Green! You know, Willie Mitchell really discovered Al Green."

"He honed in on how I should sound. He was telling me how I shouldn't sing like Wilson Pickett but just be myself. And the rest is history."

Al Green and Michael McDonald play the Cardiff International Arena on Tuesday, June 22. Tickets are priced £42.50 and £50. For more details, ring the box office on 0292 0224 488.