



kinkthink

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ILLUSTRATION BY RUTH MARTEN

Britpop Godfather **Ray Davies** on the new Kinks Acoustic Album, his daughter's band, Oasis et al, and of course, discord with brother Dave

Oasis and Blur call him Godfather; his one-man show heralds critical raves, and this summer celebrates the release of a new Kinks' album, "To the Bone," a double CD that unplugs the big hits and little gems. Kink uber alles Ray Davies basks in the glow and gives us the first peek while on tour with his critically acclaimed memoirs-and-music Kinktrospective solo show "20th Century Man: An Evening with Ray Davies."

Q: As far as the new Kinks album is concerned, has the one-man show shifted the perspective?

Ray: It's one of the problems that a performing writer gets, because the song "To the Bone" has become quite an important narrative of "20th Century Man." Now, it's difficult to go in with the band after playing it acoustically for so long, and it took two or three goes before I got it right. I had to sort of recast the song for the band after having done it for myself so much. I put two new tracks on that record—two recent songs, because it's a compilation of a lot of our old songs unplugged, so we put something new in there. One is "To the Bone" from the show.

Q: Acoustically, are some of the songs on the acoustic double CD much closer to the way you originally wrote them, rather than the full-blown loud versions?

Ray: Yes, and that is the great edge that the Kinks have always had, this ability to project songs with violence and volume on stage, and then do an acoustic or almost acapella vocal. And not many bands can do that. That is the way we've balanced our shows through the years. And certainly, as I have learned with doing these one-man shows, the acoustic performance brings out the narrative in the lyric more. For this record, we've done certain songs that have been favorites on the radio over the years but we've never actually performed live, so there is that nice balance of songs everybody knows, and ones that hardcore Kinks fans will know. There's a song called "Do You Remember Walter?" from Preservation Society about schoolboy friendships. And also "The Village Green Preservation Society" and a song called "Picture Book." There are ones that

never got played much on the radio, too. And we videotaped it, so there'll be a video released as well.

Q: In the last few years, people have been recognizing the importance of the Kinks in Britpop history and citing Oasis, Blur and Pulp as Kink-influenced. Is that satisfying?

Ray: I think it's a whole cultural thing, because I wrote songs and the Kinks recorded songs that reflected where I lived, where I came from, and the people that I knew. That's what's happening with Blur, Pulp and particularly Oasis. It's much more rewarding because they are not actually covering my songs, but rather that we seem to be paralleled in our creativity.

Q: Do you see some parallels in attitude?

Ray: You know, I listen to the current [Oasis] album, and I hear every song and I said, "Yes I know when I went through that." And I see a lot of myself in that, and I can relate to it. It's very much the attitude of the Kinks—a gritty, edge attitude to things, like their "Don't Look Back in Anger" for example is like a Kinks song in that sort of feel. Blur is more similar in the text, it's very similar to the way I would write—sort of an observation. And in an odd way, Pulp have the sort of look that Kinks had with fashion.

Q: Speaking of bands, your daughter Tor has a new band called Pout. Expound, please.

Ray: Now, when she first came to me, she was from a marriage years ago, and I had not seen her for many years. She sort of landed on the doorstep with a demo of songs. That was about a year ago, now she's got this band together. And there is that parallel there with Blur; and the band Menswear. Oddly enough, I think because of the dynamic sound of their rhythm section, they have more of a Seattle sound. I feel their future is in the United States. Oddly enough, the songs are very suburban, about living in the 90's and being young, but instrumentally and sonically, its roots are very American. It's an accessible sound.

Q: You say in the book "X-Ray" that you have learned nothing from your mistakes. Does the nature of most rock band

attitudes dictate that?

Ray: My whole philosophy about rock and roll is that it is something that has been born out of a kind of anarchic world, but in a way it has been tailored and tempered by the music industry to be something not anarchic. That's why you go through periods where there's plenty of bands making noise, and there's no content. And once in a while a band will come around and break the rules, like Nirvana, like Oasis, these landmark bands that lead the industry or set the standard for all because they are truly trying to make their statement.

Q: You and your brother Dave are now practically a cultural reference point for fighting brothers in a band. The Black Crowes' Robinson brothers and Oasis's Gallagher brothers get coverage, and you and Dave have seemingly become synonymous with sibling discord in the creative musical process. Your thoughts?

Ray: That's the way the world is. They like to focus on these things because it's not really what's on the records but what's behind the records that really defines it. I think tension between musicians is great, if it produces great creativity. But if it's all friendly and suppressed, then you turn out suppressed music. And certainly with all the new recordings I've done with Dave, there's a tension you feel in the tracks and it's like sometimes there's a musical argument going on, and that's what makes people buy the records, and it's not just the new stuff, it goes right back to "All Day and All of the Night." His aggressive guitars and my sort-of small voice popping out over the top—it's like a battle. But that, in a sense, paid off. Positively, I think it's just a powerful tool. But when it falls apart, it's just the most arduous, exhausting situation to be in. It reminds me of one of my favorite quotes, from Orson Welles in "The Third Man." He's talking to the hero, who asks why it's always undercover work and espionage and all that, and Orson turns to him and says, "Italy has had 3,000 years of wars, fighting all the time, and also all the creativity—Michaelangelo, what have you. And Switzerland's had 3,000 years of peace, never gets committed, and what has it produced? The cuckoo clock!"

Tor Davies (Ray's daughter) gets all in your face with Pout. Their first North American interview...

Bandleaders, take note on how to name your band: get socked in the puss. "I was at a punk gig and I got elbowed in the face." Tor Davies told us. "This was about the time that the band was forming. So I'm standing in front of the mirror in the bathroom, and it looks pretty bad, and I say 'it's a big pout!' So there you go." With some Nirvana sonic scratch and Debbie Harry

The band's "loud, fast, in-your-face stuff" reflects their songs' emotionally abrasive feel. "It's a much more grimy sound," she said. "The sensitive Britpop around right now is thin. Not to slight them, but many British bands are afraid to let loose. We're much more spiky—much more wrapped in barbed wire."

But why should anyone pay attention to yet another female-fronted band? The classic question! The answer is that I've got more balls than any man (Laughs). Really though, we're not fronted by some shy thing in a mini-skirt, that's for sure."

She showed up on Ray's doorstep with a demo after not having seen him in many years. He liked their sound. Tor addressed the inevitable prob-

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vocalese and even Chili Pepper bounce and bratty Runaways/Waitresses lyric turns, a listener can drown gleefully in the sound of Pout—a band that's still growing into itself. Twenty-four-year-old daughter of Kinks' Ray Davies, Tor (that's short for Victoria—duh!), fronts the punk-cum-grunge group playing Camden regularly. With guitarist Neil Hawkins, bassist Nick Rogers and a drummer simply named Miller, Pout is preparing their debut EP for release later this year.

Growing up mostly away from Dad, Tor spent her youth in North and South London. She began playing guitar at age 13. "My first song was called 'Cloudy Day,'" she laughed during her phone conversation with me from rehearsals in London. "You know, teenage stuff."

Tor's position as lead vocal and guitarist pulls from the classic female-fronted bands of the past twenty years for inspiration. "Personally, I look up to Debbie Harry. She was the one who influenced me to get up there and sing. Also, Siouxsie and the Banshees, and the early Pretenders had an effect. When I was growing up, I remember Chrissie Hynde having an effect on me, musically. And more recently, Alanis Morissette is great. The guys are into Jimi Hendrix, Cream, and Blondie, too."

lems and progressions of her link to the Kinks.

"People are always asking me what it is like to be Ray Davies' daughter. The great thing is that he is like this great big encyclopedia—he has always been in a band. People will always compare. It's a whole new ball game for us as a band—and having him involved is a real benefit. And he likes the music. I'd even say he's our number one fan."

The debut CD (on Ray's Konk label) will spotlight their gig faves, songs with names like "Red Hot," "So Special," and "Pills and Stills." "As in still-letto pumps, and that song's about Friday nights," Tor said.

"The songs are mostly about observations, emotions, and taking a stand." How high can this go? Tor's no dedicated follower: "We want to give people what they've been cheated out of," Tor told us. "We want to move away from the Britpop pack—we want to progress, to move forward. We want to come to America and show you what it is really all about." **F**