

Interview: Jon McClure from Reverend and the Makers

Written by Sam Borrett (Editor)
Tuesday, 31 March 2009 00:00



We were pretty excited to meet up with the outspoken Reverend and the Makers frontman, Jon McClure as he stands for many of the things we like to promote through the magazine. Not only that, as well as being a pretty all round decent guy, he doesn't mind saying it how it is; very refreshing in the music industry. Just to warn you that the following interview contains the sort of language we would normally asterisk out. But in this case, censoring Jon McClure somehow didn't feel quite right.

What's all this about Reverend and the Makers finishing after this next album?

What's happened is that I have nervous disposition and I have to take tablets for that. I became unwell and therefore said I actually wanted to quit. But unfortunately you can't say anything

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without it being interpreted wrong. Things that would normally be between me and my doctor became public knowledge, which fucks me off a little bit, people don't seem to let things lie. Until you say "yeah the reason I was fucking ill is because I have panic attacks" which is fucking hideous and it's a complete invasion of my private life and it's a condition that I've suffered with a number of years. It is what it is but I got really down and tired and my nerves were starting to fray and shit.

Do you think that it's actually possible to have a successful music career that puts you into the limelight without having the media trying to get into the rest of your life?

The [print] media, unfortunately in this country, is 71 per cent white, public school educated middle-class males and therefore the problem is that it's not very representative of the audience and someone who speaks out against that is rendered quite unpopular with certain sections of the media. But unfortunately the media is unelectable and is more powerful than Westminster will ever be. It's a guerrilla war, it's a battle, you know what I mean?

Everyone votes for whoever Rupert Murdoch tells them to vote for.

Well of course, yeah and we need a media monopoly bill more than we ever did before. We have a thing called Instigate Debate which is basically where all the questions are directed at celebrities, MPs, sports stars, anyone with a public profile and anyone who leads a public life. What we really wanna do is get kids asking these questions, then once they send us their videos; I'll come and play round their house and bring in a collection of acts such as the Enemy, Andy Nicholson, Drew McConnell, whoever I can rope in.

Basically I hope it will hold people to account to the things that they do and say and to the fact that they're existing in the public eye and earn millions and millions of pounds when they're actually fucking ignorant, you know what I mean? And they're actually kind of scared to say anything about the world that we live in. I think it's fair to stick a camera in someone's face and make them answer some meaningful questions rather than asking them for an autograph or a feature; you know what I'm saying?

What's been the most defining moment of your career so far?

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You know what, the defining moment for my career is still to come and I don't think that I'm anywhere near my peak. I've made this Mongrel album, which is me and Andy, Drew McConnell, and Joe Moskow and Lowkey, an Iraqi rapper. It's been dubbed up by Adrian Sherwood. I'm doing the second Reverend and the Makers album, I've done a song with Lee Scratch Perry, I'm doing an indigenous Venezuelan album for Hugo Chavez. Do you know what I'm saying? I'm a busy man. It's good to get out of your comfort zone. I'm off to Nigeria in a couple of weeks with Damon Albarn; this Africa Express thing. Yeah there's a lot happening, do ya know what I mean? I think it's good to kinda indulge yourself in these things. You know I turned down David Letterman to play in Lebanon. I feel proud of the fact that I've put me conscience above money.

Will you still be continuing with Mongrel?

I'd like to do another Mongrel album and I'd like to see Andy given a chance because after he was sacked from the Arctic Monkeys, he became really down and I love Andy to bits and I always thought that he encapsulated what that band was about. So it were a blow to us all when they sacked him. But you know what, he's back and he's made a real credible response and took a stand politically by making that record and it's not easy for a man that's been in his position being with such a big band. He should be applauded for having some courage and some credentials and making a stand saying "my life's not dominated by being in the biggest band in the world, I have my own conscience and I am my own person" you know what I mean? If you look at Andy's track record; there's the first Arctic Monkeys album, the Mongrel album, and the Mongrel dub album - which is a pretty fucking good CD. So yea it's nice to see Andy back where he belongs and also there's 18 UK MCs on [the cd] and in the last twenty years - hip-hop, rap, grime, gabba, jungle, bashment, dub-step - British MCs are continually innovative. In the meantime we've had the new rock revolution, brit-pop and new rave, all of which are backwards looking genres of music made by middle-class white people - see what I'm saying? In a narrative of British music, Black culture and Asian culture has been completely written out of the history of British music by white journalists who are essentially very conservative in their outlook. So therefore we're trying to address that. Secondly to that, there's only me and MIA amongst new artists that since 9/11 have continually questioned British foreign policy. And this record seriously takes this to task. "Don't beat around the bush, I'm a bushwacking bush killer" - is one of the lyrics know what I'm saying? I think that at a time where we need these people to come out and stand more than ever we need like a new punk or something, everyone's just fucking hiding, everybody's hiding man.

Would you consider yourself more activist or lyricist?

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Equal parts brother. I don't see the two as divorced. John Lennon never divorced the two, neither did Bob Marley, neither did Joe Strummer - I don't see why I should. Edutainment, that's what Chuck Lee calls it. I work in the edutainment business and I think that people have a lot of things to say about me, but I'm the only one doing it. And you can say what you want but that's true, it's fucking true! But I am the only fucking one doing it. FACT!

So you are very outspoken with your political views do you consider yourself a leader?

No, I just consider myself as being someone who tells the truth and who has had to become bullet proof to the things that people say about him. Punks were very unpopular doing it - what I'm saying is essentially very different from the punks, but I'm saying it in a very different climate. The climate where the rival media are all very powerful, where the vested interests of major record labels outweigh the likes of me on an independent so therefore I don't get a look in. Every time we get pushed to one side.

Do you consider yourself as being a poet?

I've always written poems. I started as a poet. Did some stuff for John Cooper Clarke and moved into the music thing. Since working with the rappers it's sharpened my game 'coz you know, you have one track where there's 18 MCs and me and this is like some veterans. This is like Skinny Man, Keiser, a rapper from Nottingham actually - Pariz 1, do you know her? She's wicked she is, she's on a couple of tracks, she's fucking brilliant, so yeah it definitely sharpens your game. Lyrically and rhythmically they're just so unbelievably good that you have to get there or you just look like an idiot.

When's the Mongrel album out?

Mongrel album's out in January and it's called Better Than Heavy and the Mongrel dubbed album will be sometime after that called, Better Than Dub.

What's your biggest fear?

That the continual slide towards fucking the world up and ignoring the people who are trying to do some good for the world and keep on criticising the people who are trying to do good for the world will mean that essentially, we're all fucked. I know that I'm quite an optimistic guy but it's hard to believe that there's anything better coming around the corner. Apparently we're all gonna vote in the fucking Tories. After reading fucking NME seeing nothing but white boys - posh white boys; it depresses me man. The whole thing is fucked. That's the greatest fear is that people just keep laughing at us and ridiculing us calling us idiots and whatever else and that's the greatest fear.

In the meantime you've got pharmaceutical companies, oil companies ruling the world.

I remember having furious rows with numerous people on the outbreak of the Iraq war. People were saying: "Yeah but we've gotta get Saddam." and I was like: "This war is wrong, it's a mistake." And years later they're all like: "Yeah, yeah". There's no joy in being right, it makes me fucking depressed, I am right never-the-less. See for me, the cornerstone for rock and roll; from Elvis, through the Beatles, through the Stones, Jimmy Hendrix, Bob Marley, the Clash, were rebellions. But there aren't any rebels anymore. It's considered rebellious to smoke crack cocaine. I know builders who smoke crack cocaine, I know bank clerks who smoke crack, that's not being rebellious. It's rebellious to fucking turn the general public against the government, that's truly rebellious. Unfortunately, music's gone soft and now its part of a capitalist structure where, in order to be successful you have to reproduce. If you're a female artist you have to sound like Amy Winehouse to do well. If you're in a band you have to sound like the Libertines. I'm friends with Carl Barat, he's a good friend of mine and I said to him: "Does it not bore you that these bands sound like yours? Does that not fucking piss you off? Do you not think that we should move on a little bit?"

He said: "Yeah I do I agree with ya - I do feel a little bit like that." I said: "You know what, it's been eight years since your band came on and I've not heard anyone do anything truly original within indie music since".

And again that's about money...

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Of course it's about money. They push it down people's throats and they tell people it's great and people start to believe it. Despite what they think, the public are fooled because these people are tastemakers. They put on the same old boring shit on every fuckin' time and what can you do about it? MySpace is supposed to be the revolution, it's supposed to take it out of the hands of the man and put it back to the people and now the man owns it again.

We're launching our own social networking site for people within the creative industries...

That's a great idea. You got my complete support there mate. Facebook me the details!

If you could collaborate with anyone, dead or alive, who would it be?

Bob Marley every time! He's at least a million times better than these others. It's like a religious experience. He's like the poet of the oppressed man and can speak to people of the world, far better than any fucking government has. Legend.

Freeq Magazine promotes social and environmental awareness, what would be at the top of your priority list right now?

Ban cars in the city. People do not need cars when you live in the city. Get on public transport. Three people who live in one house and they all take a car each to work, greedy bastards. Get on a fucking bus!