



Cocaine & Abel

 *OR, How the Brothers Gallagher
Survived Each Other To Revive **OASIS***



by: **Gregg LaGambina**
photography: **Michael Williams**

FOR SUCH A PALE and mild-mannered people, the British *do* go on and on about their bloody bands, don't they? It's like after the Beatles took over the world, they do mile-high jumping jacks every time a remotely good U.K. band comes down the pike, in hopes to recapture that past glory. Their music weeklies have headlines to rival what the *New York Post* does with actual news. Stuff like, "Kaiser Chiefs More Important Than Anything Else Ever To Exist On Any Planet Where Evidence of Water Found, And God." It's like their wee island will once again be the center of worldwide awe, if only Bloc Party would get it together long enough to reverse the events of 1776.

I am American. I really like Oasis. Yet, for a while there—say, somewhere between *Be Here Now* and *Heathen Chemistry*—a person like myself had to hide that sentiment for fear of something akin to McCarthyism. It was simply not allowed to like Oasis in America and be taken seriously with much of anything else. So, I did what any normal adult would do: I pretended not to like them. They became relegated to "guilty pleasure." If I listened to them, I'd wear headphones. I'd drive through three counties to buy a new Oasis record at a strip mall, avoiding any chance encounter with a peer. I am ashamed.

I'm ashamed, because now—some time after *Heathen Chemistry*—Oasis have released *Don't Believe the Truth*, which is, if not a full recapture of the glory of *What's the Story*, at the very least, one of the more likeable rock records of the year. And with a solidified lineup featuring guitarist Gem Archer, bassist Andy Bell and "unofficial" fifth member Zak Starkey on drums (who is also, surprise, Ringo Starr's son), they've sold out Madison Square Garden. And the Hollywood Bowl. Apparently, the blacklist has been burned, McCarthy's been jailed and we, the weak and shameful, can hang up our headphones, stroll into daylight and let the neighbors hear us go on about with our "Mucky Fingers" our "Lyla" our "Let There Be Love." And if anyone today pretends not to be won over by the charms of a track like "The Importance of Being Idle," I'll take them to the mat.

So, caught up in the mild rapture of such events, we sat down the brothers Gallagher for two separate interviews. We asked them both the same questions. In their answers, you can hear the renewed confidence that graces much of the music they're making now. You can also hear how two brothers, no matter what the family business, can truly hate loving each other. Liam and Noel have come a long way from *Definitely Maybe*, the cocaine, the rivalry and ribaldry and going from headlining Wembley to opening for the Black Crowes back to headlining the Garden and picking their own openers. Through it all, you can still hear the ongoing saga, the same saga that ripples down through history—one where the younger never learns he can't shorten the gap of years and be wiser than the elder, no matter how fast he lives. It's been the same story all along with these two, only now it's once again engaging because these brothers seem to believe in the truth all over again.

Part One. Liam Gallagher. Born: 21 September 1972.

This new record and tour is being touted as the comeback of Oasis, which implies that you've a place to come back

from. What's your reaction to that?

We've never gone away, mate. We've never taken our foot off the pedal, as far as I'm concerned. We've just put some things out and people may not dig it. That's life. It's not like we've been let out of jail or something. Every record we've put out, we've believed in.

But how do you explain selling out Madison Square Garden...

I don't explain it, man. It just says what it says. I'm really, really pleased and I'm really proud to have done that. And the fact that the kids out there still believe in us a little bit—I can't wait to get to America.

This is the first Oasis record you've made while in your 30s...

It certainly is, yeah.

What's the most significant change you can see in yourself since the first record...

I'm a lot more happy with me life, to tell you the truth. I've got kids now. I'm a lot more into the music and I know more about how things work, a little bit. You can't be going out 'til 9 o'clock in the morning talking shit and taking drugs with people the day of a gig. I've got a few more responsibilities which have chilled me out a bit, but I'm not turning into a fuckin' nod. And musically, I play my guitar every day. I'm putting the hours in, you know what I mean? Whereas, when I was 20, I was more into being the singer, rock star, going out, chasing the girls and just being a loon.

Whether the press is fair to you or not...

I couldn't give a fuck whether they're fair or not. I like it! It makes me want to get out of my bed in the morning to prove them wrong.

Well, you get quoted a lot expressing your hatred for this or that, yet you sing a lot of songs about peace and love. How do you reconcile the two?

I don't hate anything. I've got lots of love. I love my children. I love life. I love getting up in the morning. I love going out at night. I'm surrounded by great things. The only things that I dislike is some people's music sometimes. If people ask me my opinion on a band, I'm not gonna sit on the fence and go, "Oh yeah man, they're fucking great guys!" If I don't like it, I don't like it. Vice versa, they've got a right to slag my band off if they don't like it. I think people should relax a bit. I'm only winding people up when I say things about Franz Ferdinand. It's just a joke. I don't hate them. I just don't like the music and I think he sounds like the guy out of Right Said Fred. And that's it. If that's what you call a slagging off, then fuck me. You don't want to know what I really fucking think of them [chuckles].

Over here, with bands like Bloc Party...

Before we go any further, these are the little cunts that when I open a paper, these are the ones who are slagging me off! The week before I get my crack at them, I open the paper and they've got Bloc Party slagging me off! And that's fine. You slag my band off, but then you better be ready for me to fucking come after you. But, that's as far as it goes. It's just fucking hatred for each other's music. But that's life.

Well, people mumble about a resurgence of British music in the States because of bands like Bloc Party. In your mind, when was the last actual Golden Age of British music? Some people mention Britpop and the early '90s...

I'd say it was in the '90s, but I don't think it did much in America, really. I'll tell you what, though, if this is what's going on in England, they haven't got a fuckin' patch on the '90s 'cause they're forgetting how to write songs. You name one classic song that's come out of this new breed of bands. There's none. So, as well as they all look great and blah, blah, blah and there's like fucking 10 bands doing it, there's 10 shit ones. None of 'em have got any classic songs. It's all about a movement and it's all about, you know, "Oh, we've got this little band in London and we all dress the same and we all wear a lot of blazers and we wear makeup." But name one fucking great song that's come out of it all? None. So, I prefer the '90s meself.

But...

And plus, they're all ugly looking cunts!

OK.

Name one good-looking rock star out of the lot of 'em! There's none! None of 'em swear, none of 'em drink—they're all fucking soft, if you ask me. I'm not saying it's cool to swear and it's not always cool to drink, but it is if you're a rock star, innit?

But didn't George Harrison once famously say that about you guys back in the day? That no one will remember you like the Beatles will be remembered. So, in that way, you've sort of been passed the torch of not understanding this new breed of bands that may or may not be worthwhile...

[Calming down] Well, yeah, maybe. I don't know. Listen. I'll stand up and be counted; I definitely don't understand it. Fuck 'em.

Are you sick of being compared to bands from the past?

No, because that's what it's about to me. This is the thing, the problem I have with all these new bands—the likes of Coldplay. They're influenced by a living band like U2. What the fuck's that about? I'm influenced by the people that were great. I'm influenced by the Beatles, the Stones, Neil Young, the Sex Pistols—there's nothing wrong with that.

British rock was supposed to take over the world with the Stone Roses, but then Nirvana came along and sucked the life out of it. Then, Oasis rose up and sort of got the momentum going again. Do you see any relationship between British and American rock nowadays? I wouldn't know, because I'm not in this new breed or thing that's going on. I've got nothing to do with that. I don't think we were a Britpop band, we were just Oasis. It's hard for me to champion England when I don't like the bands I'm championing. It's hard for me to go, "Ah, Bloc Party, it's fucking great!" They're fucking rubbish. The only band that I like is Kasabian. You've got Kings of Leon, you've got the Strokes—I'd much prefer listening to them than fucking Bloc Party and the fucking Kaiser Chiefs. At least they look cool.

...
I'm not saying it's cool to swear and it's not always cool to drink, but it is if you're a rock star, innit?
...

What went through your mind when America sort of ate up your first two records and then by your last couple of records, the reception over here cooled. Was that confusing or disappointing...

No, not really. 'Cause every time I've been there, all I've seen is love, man, from the fans. If people don't dig it, they don't dig it. I'm not gonna fucking force it down people's throats. I was there for two months making the record and I fucking thoroughly enjoyed meself. As for people who don't like our records, they can go and suck their own cocks.

Do you ever feel like something you say might come back to bite you? Do you believe in karma?

How's it gonna come back and bite me? What, I'm gonna be stuck without a Bloc Party ticket, trying to get in? But I do believe in karma.

Is your reputation accurate, or is there something surprising about you that we still don't know about?

I'm a highly intellectual fucking alien.

Would the Liam Gallagher of today get along with the Liam Gallagher of 10 years ago?

Oh yeah, totally, without a doubt. He'd adore him. I was a top man 10 years ago and I'm a top man now.





Part Two. Noel Gallagher. Born: 29 May 1967.

This new record and tour is being touted as the comeback of Oasis, which implies that you've a place to come back from. What's your reaction to that?

In the sense that it's probably our best, most consistent album since *Morning Glory*, I understand. But, we've never actually been anywhere, so I don't know where we'd actually be coming back from. I suppose it's fair to say it's a return to form. We seem to have reacquired the spirit.

What do you make of selling out Madison Square Garden this time out?

Until I get there and see the age of the crowd, I don't know. If it's all young kids, then there must be another generation of older brothers that's passed down *Definitely Maybe* to their younger brothers. I can only imagine it's that. But if it isn't that, then I'm as dumbfounded as everybody else.

As far as there being a resurgence of music making it out of the U.K. to the States, do you like what you're hearing? I know your brother has had some things to say about it...

Liam refuses to be gracious to anybody else outside of the band Oasis and the Beatles. I think he kind of plays up to his image. There's a lot of good bands, but I don't think anybody's made a great record yet. I think a great record is on the way by somebody, but I couldn't tell you who it is. Of the bands I've seen, I really like Razorlight and I love the Libertines. I like Babyshambles. I love Kasabian. And the Coral. And the Zutons. The thing I like about it the most is that nobody's given it an all-encompassing name like fucking Britpop or fucking grunge or whatever. So, it's kind of been left to grow.

Does it feel different to be in Oasis nowadays? At some point it must have been madness; what's it like now? More comfortable, calm, assured...

I'm actually quite relieved that the rest of the

guys—particularly Liam—have started to contribute more songs, because it kind of makes my role easier. I've always wanted to be part of a band, whereas back for the first two or three—well, every album up to fucking *Heathen Chemistry*—it was a Noel Gallagher solo project in everything but name. I got a bit fucking sick of that. We'd go off around the world and it'd be, "Aren't Oasis a great band?" And I'd think, "Well, what does that actually fucking mean? What does anybody else actually contribute?" I write all the songs, I write all the lyrics, I co-produce the records, I arrange them all, I do all the interviews, I do all the photographs and I do most of the fucking gigs. It's a funny thing within this band that when it was all going wrong, it was Noel Gallagher's songs. When everybody shared in the glory, it was Oasis. Well, fucking thanks for that!

I was asking Liam about how his songwriting was developing. I guess I should be asking you that question. How much does he present

to you and how much do you decide to keep? He's got three songs on this album. I guess where my role differentiates from anybody's is that I get to choose the songs and I chose the three of his that I thought were the best. He disagrees with that completely. He thought he should've had all of his eight on the album, but that's all well and good, you know? I love "The Meaning of Soul"—I wish I had written it. I can't pay any higher complement than that. And "Guess God Thinks I'm Abel"—I fucking love it. "Love Like a Bomb"—that's a bit neither here nor there for me, but it's a good tune.

...

Liam refuses to be gracious to anybody else outside of the band Oasis and the Beatles.

...

Liam was talking about how when the band started, before you showed up, they couldn't write anything worthwhile, so you took control almost by default because you were the only one who knew how to write a song...

They weren't in any great shape before I joined them, I'll tell you that. I kind of pulled it together. If anything, everybody was completely uninterested in contributing not only songs, but ideas for parts—anything. They would just sit there and say, "Tell us what to do, oh Wise One." And I would say, "I shall decree to thee that you shall play the chords of G and A7th and no more." And they were like, "Wow! Yes, oh Wise One!" And I'd be like, "Right, now go make me a cup of coffee and shut the fuck up."

British rock was supposed to take over the world with the Stone Roses, but then Nirvana came along and sucked the life out of it. Then, Oasis rose up and sort of got the momentum going again. Do you see any relationship between British and American rock nowadays? When I met the Strokes and the Killers and Kings of Leon, they're not alien people to me. We're kind of all cut from the same cloth, even though the Kings of Leon culturally couldn't be fucking more far removed from where I come from, but we've still got all the same reference points. And the Strokes all went to nice private schools in Switzerland, or wherever they fucking went, I don't know. We're kind of working class people, but still, I can kind of relate to them. I'm not sure whether American music mirrors British music or vice versa, but the people that make this music are virtually identical in their outlooks on life. I think that's a great thing.

The reception to your last couple of records was a lot cooler than say, with *Morning Glory*. As far as your own experience making these albums, do you feel the difference between certain ones—was one easier to make, one more labored, one just coming out of you like some monster, one that you struggled with... *Standing on the Shoulder of Giants* was the low point...

See, now I like a lot of songs on that one...

Listen, I think it's got some of my best ever lyrics. It was just...I shouldn't have been in the studio or writing, I should have been fucking sitting on a beach somewhere. I think we've done a pretty good job with what we had, but the jump in level between that and this album I think kind of speaks for itself. I was trying to sum up fame and the whole fucking cocaine and drugs thing and how it turns you into a certain kind of person—trying to sum that up in every song. And you can't sort the meaning of life in one song. Not even Chris Martin can do that.

Where do you think we are on the Oasis timeline?

We've got, I think, about another album's worth of very, very strong material.

What do you make of people who pick apart your songs to figure out what other bands you sound like?

I think it's ridiculous, to be honest. Let me put it this way: You know the track "Karma Police" by Radiohead?

Yeah.

Did anybody mention "Sexy Sadie"? Anywhere? Did anybody?

Not that I can recall...

I don't fucking think so. But when they do it, right? It's like divine intervention. Isn't that just astonishing, that fucking track? See, when we do it, it's pastiche. Now, another thing: If me and Liam were two kids who were, like, 24, living in a fucking burnt out bed-sit in some inner city somewhere, making songs like the Beatles—people, rightly, like they did 10 years ago, would be going, "These two are the saviors of music." But now, because you're in your 30s and you're fairly successful, people are just like, "Well, it just sounds like the fucking Beatles." So? I don't give a fuck. I've always sounded like the Beatles. We've always sounded like T. Rex. I'm not gonna go and reinvent the band just for the sake of a few fucking British journalists. Bollocks to that, man. I fucking love Oasis! I love it! [Laughs] I fucking love it, man! When we were in the studio and we're going to the producer, "Could you make it sound more like the Beatles?" And he's going, "Yeah, but you guys gotta have your own thing." I'm like, "Fuck that, man! Make it sound like the fucking Beatles!"

Liam's a little more vocal about his feelings when it comes to other bands, so I was asking him how he reconciles singing these positive songs about love with being hateful sometimes. That led me to ask him if he believed in karma, so I guess I'll just ask you the same thing.

I believe in karma. I'm not Buddhist by any stretch of the imagination, but I believe that what you give is what you get. And I believe you only get out of things what you put in. And I believe that if you look for trouble, you find trouble and trouble will find you. And I believe that if you're smiling, the fucking whole world smiles with you.

Let's put it this way: In 1998, Liam head-butted one of our fans in Australia and broke his nose and was up in court and all that. And if he didn't believe in karma, it should have run through his mind later when he was looking for his fucking teeth in a hotel foyer in Germany. Now, me, I've never head-butted anyone in my life. It kind of infuriates him that I stay clear of trouble. It's like, why don't you fucking grow up?

Do you worry about things like legacy, or how history will judge your band?

Well, I'm kind of doing all that with *Definitely Maybe*. And who are they? I hate it when people say, "What will they think in 10 years time?" And I always think, "Who the fuck are they?" Is there some panel that sits somewhere and says, "Well, today's judgment day for Oasis. What are we saying: seven out of 10? Eight?" As long as I'm buried in a coffin full of cash, I couldn't care less. **F**

.....

A Word Association Discography of Oasis
With Single-Word Commentary by
Liam and Noel Gallagher



Definitely Maybe (1994)

Liam: Classic. Noel: Young.

(What's the Story) Morning Glory? (1995)

Liam: Classic. Noel: Big.

Be Here Now (1997)

Liam: Classic. Noel: Fat.

Standing on the Shoulder of Giants (2000)

Liam: Classic. Noel: Dark.

Heathen Chemistry (2002)

Liam: Classic. Noel: Grey.

Don't Believe the Truth (2005)

Liam: Classic. Noel: Technicolor.