

# SUPERGRASS

K e e p T h e i r T e e t h C l e a n

and how about that bass intro to 'Lenny', the one that goes 'bah buh, buh, buh, buh...' for ages.

"We've lost that off beat so many times playing it live, and we're completely fucked once that happens. Nobody can start until Danny hits the snare, and he usually gets really pissed or something, and leaves us hanging for ages. So, we're shouting at him and throwing things, and eventually he does it."

Is it all just a bit of a laugh?

"Yeah! It should be. It's really hard to take it seriously. We write the songs half tongue in cheek all the time. You can't rip off the Sex Pistols directly and do a really serious song with it. Like 'Caught by the Fuzz' — it's a good song, it's about drugs and about being young and stuff, but it's also taking the piss out of it. Like, you got your fingers burned but it's quite funny at the same time when you look back at it."

So, lets look back at how this all happened. First up you should know Gaz and Danny used to be in a shoegazey band called the Jennifers. They released one single on Nude (Suede's label), and after it went absolutely nowhere they decided maybe they should look for something else.

"Well, I was working with Gaz in this restaurant when the Jennifers split up, and he was looking for a new band. I'd known Danny for years, sort of seen him around town and stuff. So, after work one night we went to my house and had a massive jam, then we went off to get Danny's drum kit in this little Renault 5 of his. We had all the gear in there and me lying underneath the drum kit in the boot, and we went off to a little shed and had another jam. For about

six months before we wrote any songs, we just went into this little shed and jammed for ages."

It almost seems like you were the ingredient Gaz and Danny needed for success?

"I don't think I changed it all that much. I mean, they've got a completely different bass style, because I'm the bass player, but Gaz is still writing the same sorts of songs that he used to in the Jennifers. All three of us put stuff into it, so it changes the sound of them. I suppose I'm responsible in some ways, but I think they're growing up as well, and getting better at song writing."

Anyway, back to the story. Out of the jamming came the songs, and an infamous six track demo, recorded in February last year. Supergrass didn't have a label when they made it, so they did a deal with the studio which involved paying royalties to the studio itself. I'm sure the studio were happy about that when 'Caught by the Fuzz' and 'Strange Ones' appeared on their album in demo form.

"Then we just spent the rest of the time playing gigs around Oxford and stuff, while the tape went round a few record companies. While that was happening we managed to do this thing with this local guy, who pressed a thousand copies of the single, 'Caught By The Fuzz'. He's this really nice guy who just works out of his bedroom. He'd get all his life savings together and pay for the pressing of the single, and then he'd sell them all, break even, and do it again. He'd done it with a couple of other local bands, but when he did that for us and they sold out in a week, he pressed up loads more. Then EMI came sniffing about."

Then for Mickey Quinn (24), Gaz Combes (19) and Danny Goffey (21) the rock 'n' roll

dream came true, as they say. No more travelling to gigs in the tiny Renault 5 — they were provided with a 20 foot tour bus. No more scraping up money for a couple of six packs before the gigs — now the tools of sensory obliteration are delivered compliments of an appreciative record company. And Supergrass are more than happy to indulge.

"Yeah, we'd like to do that every night, but we seem to play so many gigs we'd be dead by the end of it. We take it in turns. Like, for me anyway, I'll get pissed for a gig maybe once a week, and every two weeks I'll be totally out of my head before I go on. That's the way to do it. And the others don't go *completely* over the top."

There are whispers that Supergrass may be heading down here for *The Big Day Out*, but their main focus at the moment is the States. Their first salvo is the 'Caught By the Fuzz' single, which was *meant* to have Hugh Grant's mug shot on the promo posters, but Mr Grant's lawyers didn't find it too amusing.

"Publicity scam. We didn't have much to do with that really. It was a really cool idea but it wasn't ours. I think what happened was some guy in the American office said: 'Yeah, lets do these Hugh Grant posters,' and then thought: 'Let's leak the story so we don't have to print them.'"

So, college radio loves them and there are plenty of write-ups, but how many times have you heard that before? The American market is a slow and arduous one to crack, and the road to Stateside success is littered with casualties like the Sex Pistols, the Smiths and other great bands the Yanks just didn't get.

"Well, yeah, the problem with all English

bands is that none of them can break the States. It's not really a huge priority in my mind, but it'd be nice and it's worthwhile giving it a go while we're still fresh. We've been out twice already, but only for a couple of weeks each time, not gruelling tours or anything. We're about to go over again for a month and a half."

Is the way to break the States to go there in bits and pieces?

"Well, yeah. I couldn't handle going over there for four months because I'd miss my baby growing up and stuff, and I'd go completely nuts."

Yup, the gurgles I hear throughout the interview aren't of the groupie variety. Mickey has been bottle feeding and burping his four month old daughter. He says his new arrival isn't going to get in the way of the band's future.

"It hasn't really stopped me so far. It's tending to keep my head on the ground even more, which is good really."

One of the biggest double standards in music today is the acceptability of DJ culture to sample, steal and reinvent the past, while any rock or indie bands who dare let *their* influences show are hounded for being unoriginal. Admittedly, they're hounded by a bunch of ageing tossers who pine for the good old days and whinge on about having heard it all before. But still, one of the few criticisms of Supergrass is that they've reinvented the past, that they sound a bit retro. It's also part of their appeal.

"Yeah, definitely, but that *is* the sound of the 90s. I mean, if you're still playing guitar music after 30 years, it's gonna sound retro isn't it? And if it still sounds good, then keep playing it, I say."

JOHN TAITE

*half tongue in cheek all the time. You can't rip off the Sex Pistols directly and do a really serious song with it."*

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