



Lenny Kravitz

Life at the Big Top

It's past the midnight hour in Los Angeles and Lenny Kravitz is calling five hours late. After a day of interviews for his album *Circus*, trying to rehearse his band in the evening, and the frustrations of what he calls "the whole thing", Lenny sounds tired. Has he made it home yet?

Is Los Angeles your home town?

"No, it's not," Lenny yawns. "I'm just here rehearsing, visiting my family. My mother lives here. My daughter lives here."

He doesn't call any town home.

"I just make home where I am."

Lenny is known for his use of vintage tube equipment to record, his collection of classic guitars and the odd recycled riff. He chooses not to use digital equipment.

Have you explored vintage gear to its full extreme?

"No, I've only done it for four albums. It's endless, what you can do, just like any recording. It sounds different, it's a sound I like, but all four of my albums, as far as sound goes, they don't sound at all like each other. It's all about the instruments, the room and everything. The recorder just records. There's endless amounts of sounds you can do."

Do you continue to use the same New Jersey recording facility?

"We didn't do it all at Waterfront this time. We went to England, France, the Bahamas, and we took everything with us."

Are you a compulsive guitar buyer? Do you buy one every few weeks?

"Not every couple of weeks, but I do own several guitars. I collect. I'm very much into them."

Do you keep them at home?

"No, I have them in these lockers in New York, but I keep some of it with me. On the road, I take out 20 guitars."

Is *Circus* a cynical title for your new album?

"Well, it goes a lot of ways. It's got a piece of that in it but it really reflects my life, the way it's been the last few years."

Being a well-known musician must be an everyday matter now?

"Yeah, but there's so much that's not just being a musician. Being in the business, there's a whole lot of shit that goes on that's got nothing to do with music. I love playing music, that's what I live for. I breath for music, that's my thing. The circus is really all the other things that come with it."

You haven't had the public fights that Prince or George Michael have had with their record companies.

"Well, no, I haven't gone through that, but there are a whole lot of other things too. You start out being just one guy making music for your pleasure. Then you decide you want to do it professionally and you get a record deal, if you're fortunate, and I was, after several years of trying."

"Then success and things happen, if you're so fortunate. Then what comes with success is a whole lot of other things, the circus part of it. All of a sudden you're in the middle of a big Fellini movie, and you wonder how your life got like that."

Are you supportive of people like Prince and George Michael, who have tried to get a better deal for the artist?

"Sure, the artist is where it all comes from. You might say: 'Well Prince makes a lot of money, what's he complaining about?' But when you really know about how the dollars and cents work, the artist doesn't get what they should."

As they get bigger, surely people can look after themselves? Don't you think the artist gets a fairer share if he's nearer the top?

"I don't know. If an artist is making a lot of money he's really making a stupid, tremendous amount of money. Most artists don't even own their music, their masters. They may own the publishing and the songwriting, but they don't own the masters. There's lots of things that can be very unfair about record

deals if you're not careful."

Is video making a part of your music making that you enjoy?

"I enjoy it at times. It's not my main focus. I've been enjoying it this album. I'm very happy with the 'Rock 'n' Roll is Dead' video."

Do the videos impose an unwanted literal meaning?

"No, image stands for a complete piece of music all the time. Images come and go, colour is feelings. I prefer it just being music, but that's not the way it is."

Lenny is realistic about the need to make videos and tour. He told *Billboard* magazine: "I'm not a Pearl Jam — white middle American favourite. If I didn't tour and make videos, my ass would be over."

Are you angered by the 'retro' tag?

"They've quietened down with that. Music is timeless. People need to stop putting categories and time limits on music. Music is music, man. Nothing's old, nothing's new, it's all just music, it's all just expression. That's just human beings trying to intellectualise and make much more out of things than it should be."

Speaking of retro, Lenny is not behind the clavinet on his duet on the last Mick Jagger solo album.

"The track was already cut. I just came in and sang."

Lenny doesn't appreciate separating the lyric from the music, or talk of the 'poetry' of lyric writing.

"I'm an artist. I'm a musician. I express my

feelings, it's real simple. It's like singing the blues, you say what you got to say."

Is there more of an interest in the spiritual dimension now?

"It's always in there. It's just different every time."

Is it difficult to reconcile the rock 'n' roll side with a track like 'God'?

"No. What is the rock 'n' roll side? We all live differently. Just because I'm a rock 'n' roll artist, it doesn't mean I live like everybody else."

Why do you work alone and play all the instruments? Is it a loner attitude?

"It's because I can [laughs]. I can play the instruments and I enjoy doing that. It's like a thing to me. I enjoy it."

It's not anti-social behaviour?

"No. It's just like a painter, painting his picture himself. That's how I see it."

But is it easy to transfer to a band on the stage?

"It takes a bit of work. Then we grow into it and it becomes quite natural."

What's the worst question you've been asked today? I hope it wasn't one of mine.

"No, actually, it wasn't. I can't really remember, the day's been so long. No. Your questions have been quite fine."

On his last world tour Lenny only got as far as Australia, but he plans to play New Zealand in February.

"I'm just focussing on my thing right now. I have a lot of work ahead of me on the road."

MURRAY CAMMICK