

THE ROCK

Razorlight's
Johnny Borrell



WHAT HAPPENED TO RAZORLIGHT?

Eight years ago, Razorlight were one of the UK's hottest bands. Their first two albums, *Up All Night* (2004) and *Razorlight* (2006), both went four times platinum. They rocked Live 8 and supported The Rolling Stones, The Who and Queen. And there was a time when you couldn't sit near a UK radio without hearing smash single 'America'.

But in 2009, a year after disappointingly received third album *Slipway Fires*, drummer Andy Burrows quit. A year later, guitarist Björn Ågren and bassist Carl Dalem also left,

“I've never had anyone in my life, in the real world, say I'm arrogant”

leaving just one member: outspoken frontman Johnny Borrell. Speculation was rife that 32-year-old Borrell's gargantuan ego – he reportedly once called himself ‘the best songwriter of my generation’ – had finally caused the others to flee. So as Borrell prepares to bring an all-new Razorlight to Dubai, we asked him simply: what happened, Johnny?

‘What happened was that... ummm... [long pause] our drummer left halfway through touring the third album... for his own personal reasons. You'd have to ask him. And Björn and Carl, I think they reached a point where...

You'd have to ask them,’ he concludes, almost uncertainly. ‘I still really like being in Razorlight. It's quite fun, so I'm still here.’

It's one in a series of guarded explanations he cooks up when pressed for answers. Borrell's passion for the band's rebirth seems genuine, but one can't help wondering if it's because enthusiasm for a short-lived solo career – which was how the new Razorlight line-up debuted in early 2011 – was lukewarm. He refuses to discuss how much he paid his ex-band mates in order to keep the Razorlight name. ‘That's their business,’ he says. ‘I don't know the financial ramifications of that.’

Borrell's elusive charm is at odds with the rock'n'roll bravado he's renowned for, but both tacks appear to come from some savvy school of media operating. It's not arrogance he spews now, but earnestness. ‘I think you just concentrate on your own reality,’ he says when asked about his reputation. ‘I've never had anyone in my life, in the real world, say I'm arrogant. Real life is different to this fake thing.’

One thing he can talk coherently about is his love of bikes. While chatting to us from his London home, he is, apparently, using a felt tip to doodle on today's copy of *Motorbike News*. ‘The day I got a record deal I went out and bought a motorbike,’ he adds, ‘and I'm still riding that bike today. It's my zen thing.’

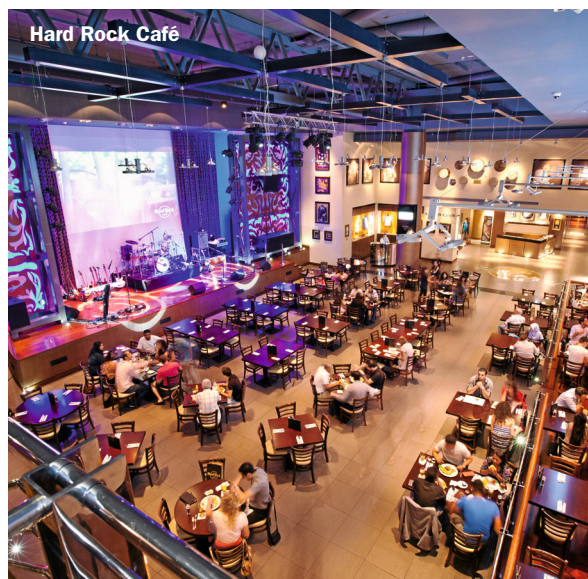
For a man who once appeared on the ‘Worst Dressed’ and ‘Villain of the Year’ shortlists at the *NME* Shockwave Awards in 2007, bikes

also offer a refuge from public recognition. He remembers the night in 2006 that Razorlight played London's Albert Hall.

‘After the gig I jumped on the bike and rode around outside listening to what people were saying about the show,’ he remembers. ‘Nobody knew who I was; I was just another [idiot] in leathers.’

It's a rare moment of fragility in our 45-minute interview; the mask has slipped on Borrell's charm offensive. So he struggles with being recognised? ‘I don't struggle with anything,’ he replies, back in character. ‘I'm just amazingly grateful. I've always wanted to be in a band, all my energy went into it, and I'm glad it worked out and I can make music. Any rough that comes with that is nothing.’ ●

Hard Rock Café



THREE PLACES TO BE A REAL BIKER IN DUBAI

BIKERS CAFÉ

Dubai's best-known bike-themed hangout attracts the old-school faithful. Expect burgers, sandwiches and (not-so-biker) salads. *Open daily 7.30am-1am. Jumeirah Beach Road (04 349 3585).*

HARD ROCK CAFÉ

‘It sounds like a cliché,’ says Harley Davidson MENA marketing manager Elsa Abi Nader, ‘but bikers love it here.’ *Open Sat-Wed noon-1am; Thu-Fri noon-3am. Festival Centre, Dubai Festival City (04 232 8900).*

HESSA ENOC PETROL STATION ON AL KHAİL RD

That's right – a petrol station. The Harley Owners' Group Dubai chapter meets here every Tuesday evening (7.30pm) and Friday morning (5.30am) to fill the tanks before hitting the road for one of their regular rides. www.hoguae.com.