

Meeting your Maker

Reverend and the Makers' Jon McClure talks break-ups, breakdowns and famous friends. Words *Rob Garratt*

It was the musical rivalry of a generation, the most publicly hyped chart showdown since The Beatles and The Rolling Stones. No one with a passing interest in '90s British pop music could escape the media battle played out between Oasis and Blur on a daily basis. But what far fewer people know is that when history was made this March, as Noel Gallagher and Damon Albarn ended a two-decade feud by sharing a stage at London's Royal Albert Hall, there was a silent cog behind the scenes.

That cog was another strong musical personality: Jon McClure, frontman of Reverend and the Makers, who play The Music Room in Dubai in a fortnight's time. Around a year before that very-public reunion for the Teenage Cancer Trust – for which, incidentally, Gallagher's gig in Dubai a week earlier was a warm-up – McClure was tasked with putting a call in between the two men he's lucky enough to call friends. And guess who made the first move?

'I gave Noel a ring on Damon's behalf, to get him to do something [with Damon],' remembers McClure, like he's talking about a couple of mates we know from the pub. 'I think they have done something together?'

'I gave Noel [Gallagher] a ring on Damon [Albarn]'s behalf'

Yes Jon, they have. Aside from the charity gig duet, earlier this month Noel said he would be 'interested in working' with Albarn, while former Blur bandmate Alex James has told journalists the pair are already 'working together on a lot of stuff'. Kind of a big deal, you might say.

'In the '90s when [the feud] was really at its height, I was a kid,' admits McClure, now 32. 'Thinking how weird it is years later, being the guy who was trying to pass on their numbers to each other – if somebody had told me when I was 13 that this would happen, that'd be pretty mad.'

This isn't the only time a famous name comes up when we take a call from McClure. With unfettered



nonchalance he talks about partying with Kasabian, working with Gorillaz, campaigning with The Libertines' Carl Barat, jamming with Afrobeat legend Tony Allen and catching his 'friend' Flea from the Red Hot Chili Peppers practising bass in a Lagos hotel room. And let's not forget the flat he shared with someone from a band called the Arctic Monkeys – one Alex Turner.

One can't help but wonder why, with endorsement from such high places – Reverend and the Makers have been called on to support Oasis, Ian Brown, The Verve and Red Hot Chili Peppers – why McClure's band is known only a fraction as well as his famous friends. After briefly catching the British public imagination with their first two singles – 'Heavyweight Champion of the World' and 'He Said He Loved Me', from *The State of Things* in 2007 – the band have not had a chart hit. And at what should have been the peak of their success, after supporting Oasis' ill-fated final tour in 2009, the band imploded in the wake of a poorly received second album, *A French Kiss in the Chaos*. So what happened, Jon?

'We made a very, very, very political record,' he says simply. 'You make a political record, people ridicule you.' He points his finger at the middle-class dominance of the UK's

record labels, radio and press. 'There's an attitude in Britain that you're not allowed to have a northern accent and be outspoken and intellectual. And I'm considered to be a loudmouth or a novelty or whatever.'

This prejudice, perceived or otherwise, took its toll, sparking a period of hedonism in McClure's life that saw the band take a two-year hiatus. 'It all got a bit dark for a minute,' he says sombrely. 'I can't tell you the kind of anguish you feel, when you think long and hard about the lyrics you write, and people just dismiss them as stupid.'

'I called it a day, I just sat in my house feeling sorry for myself.'

McClure pulled himself together to pen a third album, last year's *@ Reverend_Makers*. He promises there's 'lots, lots' more records left to write, and doesn't rule out going solo. When the conversation turns to Dubai and the region, he talks about his love of Arabic food and Al Jazeera news, and the Iraqi woman he dated for six years.

Now however McClure is partnered with the Makers' keyboard player Laura, and – despite returning to his ex for a spell – the pair married 'four or five' years ago. 'She's like my best mate,' he tells us, before explaining

his partner's other strong suite is allowing his band to emulate Pulp and keep alive the 'Sheffield thing' of having a girl at the keys.

It's clear McClure is less at ease discussing these personal politics than world affairs, but after an impassioned

20-minute rant about the injustices of the system we remind him we're here to talk about music. He stops short. 'Yeah – I don't want people to think I'm coming over to do some sort of political rally,' he says. 'If I'm honest, I like having a laugh and making people dance. It's not like I'm worried about changing the world any more.'

Reverend and the Makers play The Music Room on Friday October 4, 9pm. Dhs100. Majestic Hotel Tower, Bur Dubai (04 501 2534).



Jon McClure

▶ **NEXT WEEK:** The Wailers discuss living in the shadow of a legend ahead of their Sandance gig