

Ben Wallers macht mehr und besser, und das seit 20 Jahren: genial-schelmische Verschmelzungen von Garage Rock, Country, Anarchismus, Grant und den fiesesten Texten seit es Schokolade gibt. Solo heißt er The Rebel, spielt aber auch in Bands wie The Male Nurse und Devil. Am meisten gerissen hat er mit seiner Combo Country Teasers. Willkommen im Ben Wallers-Universum!

Text & Fotos: Rokko

Ben Wallers hat weder Homepage, noch social media-Account. Man findet seine E-Mail-Adresse nirgends mit einem Smiley versehen: „Bitte schreib mir!“ Er hat Besseres zu tun als den letzten Rest Würde zu töten und seine drei täglichen Mahlzeiten zu fotografieren, um Likes zu sammeln. Über zwei, drei Ecken kann ich mit ihm in Kontakt treten und erzähle ihm, dass ich gerne eine Story über ihn schreiben möchte. Wie sich aber dem Phänomen Ben Wallers annähern und ihn fassbar vorstellen? Sein Output ist immens, und diesem muss man sich selber aussetzen, insofern wäre es sinnlos (wenn auch spannend), hunderte Songs textlich und musikalisch zu analysieren. Ich schlage ihm also vor, eine gemeinsame Tour durch seinen Lebensmittelpunkt London zu unternehmen, bei der wir allerdings nicht seine Lieblingsplätze abklappern, sondern Orte, die

er meidet: nicht die Buchhandlung seines Vertrauens, sondern jene, wo er mal was mitgehen hat lassen und sie ihn erwischte haben; nicht sein Lieblingspub, sondern eins, wo er immer wieder vorbeigeht und sich jedes Mal denkt: „Hier nicht.“ Kurz: sämtliche Plätze des Hasses und der Angst. Seine Antwort: „Deine Idee ist ganz interessant... aber es ist doch sehr unwahrscheinlich, dass ich zustimme, an Orte zu gehen, die ich nicht mag, findest du nicht? Vielleicht können wir wohin gehen und so tun, als ob ich es dort nicht mögen würde.“ Gerne.

Wir treffen uns um zehn am Vormittag in einem Fahrradladen in der Chatsworth Road im Londoner Stadtteil Hackney. Ben Wallers kommt mit einem gelben Dreiradler, den er am Vortag erstanden hat. Die Speichen sitzen locker und gehören optimiert. Er hat zwar seinen bekannten Hut nicht auf, die Brille ist aber noch immer so groß wie in den 1990ern. Auf der Rückseite seines Mantels (darunter: Camouflage; darunter: Pullundriges; darunter: ein bis nach oben zugeknöpftes Hemd) steht ein schlichtes „HATE“, auf der Vorderseite hängt eine gelbe Blume. Sein Ring zeigt eine schief gegangene Swastika, die dem The Rebel-Logo eng verwandt ist, und auf der Hand ist genau ein Fingernagel rot lackiert. Gegensätze und Konfusion, Regelverstoß und ein fragwürdiges Lächeln sind nur ein paar der Grundsätze seines Oeuvres.

The Rebel says: Country Teasers will never die!

Ben Wallers sagt, er will in die Marshes trotten – ein sumpfiges Niemandsland, weiter im Osten. Doch davor gehen wir noch kurz zu einer Art Zweitwohnsitz von ihm: ein gemütlich eingewohntes Haus eines Freundes, der viel unterwegs ist und wo er die Katze füttern soll. Wir gehen in die Küche, er kocht uns Kardamom-Tee. Im Keller hat er ein kleines Kämmerchen, das er fallweise bewohnt. Die Stiege hinunter ist gefährlich, unten eine Matratze, ein Tape-Rekorder und Tapes. Keine Luxussuite, aber alles, was Ben Wallers braucht. Er gibt mir eine The Rebel-Kassette und sagt: „Das ist mein Lieblingsformat. Auch, wenn ich mir eine Platte kaufe, überspiele ich sie auf ein Tape – nur ein bisschen lauter. Dann klingt alles besser.“ Nicht nur seine Hörgewohnheiten sind eigen, auch sein Musikgeschmack ist sympathisch breit gefächert, u. a. war er mit Wesley Willis auf Tour, schätzt das deutsche Trio und die amerikanischen Jon Wayne, die die Kultur um sich herum gezielt lächerlich gemacht und sabotiert haben – eine Gemeinsamkeit.

Wir gehen wieder hinauf und nehmen im Wohnzimmer Platz. Ich sehe an der Wand ein Bild von der Serie „The Young Ones“, von denen der verdammt coole Rik Mayall erst kürzlich verstorben ist. Ben Wallers war ein großer Fan, hat das Bild aufgehängt und sich nach dem Todesfall wieder einmal alle Folgen angesehen. Er behauptet zwar von sich, dass er ein schlechter Leser ist und leicht abgelenkt wird, schafft es aber trotzdem durch ziemliche Schwarten wie etwa Roberto Bolaños Meisterwerk „2666“, das er für das „Ulysses“ unserer Generation hält. Ich kann nur heftig nicken.

Wir verlassen das Haus und bewegen uns raus aus der Zivilisation, Richtung Marshes. Das Gras ist nass, der Boden sumpfig, keine Menschenseele zu sehen. Ben Wallers ist

begeistert, dass in diesem unkontrollierten Großraum noch Dinge passieren können, ohne dass man dabei beobachtet wird – weder von anderen Menschen, noch von Kamearas, die sonst das ganze Leben der Stadtbürger aufzeichnen. „OK, das sieht zwar nicht so aus, aber hier war früher ein Golfplatz. Manchmal findet man noch Überreste...“, sagt er, und blickt konzentriert auf den Wildwuchs am Boden. Ich fühle mich wie auf einer archäologischen Stätte. Wir gehen querfeldein, um diese Startdreiecke für Golfspieler zu finden, die laut Ben Wallers noch hier sind. Und was finden wir? Nichts! Nach einiger Zeit Herumwaten meine ich laut, dass er sich die Geschichte des verlorenen Golfplatzes sicher grade ausgedacht hat, woraufhin er im Gehen beiläufig summt: „Ja, nur ein kleines Märchen, damit ich dich an einem Ort hab, wo ich dich umbringen und verschwinden lassen kann, ohne dass es jemand mitkriegt.“ Das macht Ben Wallers gerne: in eklige Gestalten schlüpfen und sie dann sprechen lassen. In seinen Texten hört man die übelsten Charaktere einer weißen, männlich dominierten Gesellschaft laut dahindenken. Er kräut in die Rolle der größten Wichser, ohne das weiter zu kommentieren. Wer ein Gespür hat, kann sich bei Ben Wallers für seinen aufklärerischen Dienst bedanken: es bleibt einem *thank fuck* selbst überlassen, die Texte eigenständig zu dechiffrieren. Wer allerdings nur einmal hinhört und den Texter und die im Text sprechende Person als Einheit sieht, darf gerne kotzen gehen und ein neues Manifest für Entartete Kunst verfassen.

Als ich also auf den Moment warte, dass Ben Wallers mich kalt macht, finden wir tatsächlich ein buntes Dreieckchen mit der Aufschrift „113 yards“. Gut, von hier sollten es dann 113 yards zum Loch sein. In welche Richtung? Das steht nirgends geschrieben, genauso wenig, wie dass der Abschlag tatsächlich hier stattfinden sollte und noch



irgendwo im Moor ein Loch zu finden sein würde. Ben Wallers sieht sich unbeeindruckt um: „Diese Richtung sicher nicht, da ist der Fluss... da drüben sind zu viele Bäume... probieren wir hier rüber!“, sagt's, und marschiert laut yard-zählend gerade in irgendeine Richtung. Ich folge, und bei 78 yards liegt plötzlich eine andere Golfpyramide im Dreck, mit der Aufschrift „86 yards“. Also gut, 86 yards wieder in eine intuitiv gewählte Richtung. Wir schreiten voran, doch dann schweift Ben Wallers ab, weil er urinieren muss. Anschließend geben wir die Golfmission auf und spazieren zu einer alten Kläranlage. Nach deren Besichtigung gehen wir zu einem mächtigen Steinkreis, dem versteckten Stonehenge von London. So, jetzt haben wir schon drei Stunden beim Strawanzen palavert, es wird Zeit, das Tonband einzuschalten. Lasset das offizielle Interview beginnen! Das Gespräch soll auf Englisch abgedruckt sein, da Deutsch aber seine Lieblingssprache ist, bleibt die Einleitung Ben Wallers zu Ehren so.

So, Ben Wallers – why don't you like face-to-face interviews? You got a nasty reputation, but it turns out you are a really nice guy.

[laughing] Thanks! Well, because I think I'm quite boring, actually, to talk to. I am a nice guy and that's really boring. I think that interviews should be a bit more exciting. When

I do a written interview, I can create more of a character and be a bit more obnoxious.

I see what you mean. It's really interesting to think of the meanest or most stupid answers and write them down. 'cause sometimes the truth is so boring.

Yeah, but that's also the good thing about your musical output and the controversial things you sing. Now I know that you work in the Camden Garden Centre, but if you'd told me that you take care of disabled people or difficult children – it would make perfect sense to me...

Yeah.

... 'cause you deal with those kinda topics in your lyrics, but not in an arrogant, pretentious way. It seems like it's coming from somewhere you know your way around, from analyzing the culture around you. Not like so many other people and magazines, where irony is used as a cheap excuse for not having a standpoint at all. But within your irony, there's a lot of truth and courage.

Yeah. But I'm the last person to say that 'cause when I write, I don't try to think about it too hard, so it just comes out. But hopefully, what you say is true, and the reason my lyrics work – when they do, and a lot of them don't, and then they

don't make it onto songs... But when they work, it's because they are about something that is morally good, and I present it in the form of irony. And it's satire because I'm trying to attack. I'm not usually defending, but attacking. I don't like to say nice things because probably I'm too angry. People have sometimes said: 'Why don't you write any love songs?' And, you know, why would you write a love song whilst the ebola virus is out there?! It's like bourgeois really, and pop music. I guess pop music was about love songs because that's easy to sell and it's marketing that kind of 50s postwar dream-thing, but I don't feel it.

I think your lyrics and your music are a great unity, because sometimes there is such a retarded element in your music and it works perfectly well together with your words.

Yeah.

Like: 'Only Jews are allowed to make jokes about Jews.' Of course you can have those lyrics with your music! It just works, it makes perfect sense.

That's good and I'm glad, but it's not anything I really do on purpose. I don't really know what I'm doing and so for me the process – I can only describe it in very boring, simple terms: I've got some tunes, and they're in a certain rhythm, so I play some drums, and then I put the tunes on the drums and then I have to come up with some lyrics – 'cause it's gonna be a song, I don't want it to be an instrumental – and then I go through my notebooks. That's it. That's all I know about my process. [laughing] I don't know about what I'm really doing and where it comes from. I guess I just had a really good education.

What was it like?

I went to a private school, prep school it's called, until I was eleven or twelve. And then you graduate. In the private school system – which is called public schools – you graduate to a public school when you're twelve, thirteen. I went to like the most expensive one in Britain probably, Harrow. I got a scholarship to that so my parents only had to pay two thirds of the fee, we got a third off.

So you were the hope of your generation?

Definitely! [laughing] My dad wanted me to be a lawyer.

Alright! And when did you decide that's not gonna happen?

Hmm, I don't know. My dad is a really nice guy and he would have said gently: 'I really hope you'll be a lawyer, Benedict.' He wouldn't have said: 'You're gonna be a lawyer!' And I just would have probably said: 'OK, but I don't wanna be a lawyer.'

No regrets now?

Yeah, of course, I could be rich! Maybe in another universe, I could be the best lawyer operating. We could have got equal rights for workers and nurses in this country.

So you're not working systematically on: 'Uh, I wanna break this taboo and this taboo.' I'm just trying to link different things together here: Now there's all that paedophile-stuff

coming out in Britain. And you had John Peel-sessions with your band The Male Nurse.

Yeah, two.

And John Peel's also had sex with...

... 14 year olds, yeah.

And there were also these ships for pirate radio stations: places for big orgies, teenage girls and drugs were brought in constantly for the radio djs who acted like they had invented the world.

Yeah, you don't really know what John Peel was like, just from his show. And I read his book and I used to talk to him on the phone. He would have a phone in his studio and you could phone him up, and you had to wait for a long time before he would answer. He was really nice and he did a huge amount for music, but none of that means that he didn't also have a taste for young girls, sexually. So I'm not really surprised, it doesn't even mean he wasn't a nice guy, he could have been a nice guy and a paedophile. He could have been a murderer, a satanist – and a nice guy. But I don't know enough and the issue is so muddy. Sex – even when it's between two consenting adults – is already a minefield. And what young girls are into... a lot of 14 year old girls are really into sex – but they don't know what it means, they don't know what they're getting into. But I know that most men are predatory and would fuck anything that moves.

The stories that come out about Jimmy Savile and Rolf Harris and Max Clifford – I like hearing those because I already thought they were evil shitheads and I hated them.

Yeah, 'Jim'll fix it'!

Yeah. You got a feeling, just from the TV: 'Eaaaaaugh...!' And so it's good to have that feeling confirmed: 'Oh, thank god! They are paedophiles – now I know I was right in hating them.'

[laughing] Yeah, I'm just surprised that nobody talks about the John Peel issue. He's still that holy, untouchable...

Yeah, he is holy, because what he did for music is really good. It's not like what Jimmy Savile did for music. I guess Jimmy Savile did a lot of charity work, but I expect people are protecting John Peel because I don't wanna look at all my Fall-Peel-sessions and think I've got to snap the tapes in halves – I don't wanna have to do that.

Yeah, I just think you should be aware of both, that he did have great taste in music, but that he also did it with children.

Yeah.

John Peel loved The Fall, and your stuff too.

No, he didn't like our stuff.

Really?!

Yeah, because I wore a hat, and he often used to say on air: 'The one thing I don't like is bands that wear hats.' He also didn't play a lot of hip-hop, because it had misogynist lyr-

ics. And I don't know, but I think he might have thought whether I was being ironic or whatever – I'm still saying openly misogynist things. Or maybe he just didn't like us. But then, he liked The Male Nurse and then he played The Rebel, he played one of my singles in about 2008.

But he never got into the Country Teasers?

To my knowledge, he never played us... although somebody did say they heard him play one of our songs.

As a negative example: 'Don't sing anything like this!'

[laughing] No, I think he might have played 'Secrets in Welsh', with Welsh lyrics. Because he was a huge fan of Datblygu, this Welsh band that I like. They're heroes of mine – but quite old already now. I mean, I think that I'm too old to be doing this. It should be young people that do it. It's rock'n'roll, you should be on stage, it's a sexual thing. With old guys... you are very lucky if some old guy's gonna produce a good album.

We've been talking about Mark E. Smith, he still does good stuff, not always, but still. I know you are a huge fan of The Fall – do you know what he thinks about your stuff?

No. I don't imagine he pays that much attention because I know that he doesn't really like bands that obviously sound influenced by The Fall. I doubt he's really into it – but I also don't care 'cause he's crazy.

[laughing] Yeah, I just read the book 'The Fallen', and a while ago a book by John 'Drumbo' French, the former drummer of Captain Beefheart's Magic Band.

Oh really? Oh, that I would love to read!

It's really interesting. He's got a certain position, of course: the tortured teenager that he was back then in the band, but still, you get an insight into Captain Beefheart's working process. And also in the book about The Fall, with Mark E. Smith as that manipulating character...

Were you ever like this?

[laughing] Yeah, but I didn't do it on purpose. I just thought that my friends all wanted to be in a band and have fun and I was the facilitator of that. Therefore, they would be happy with doing what I told them to do – so I was a dictator. But I felt that it was a benevolent dictatorship. I was really naïve, I didn't realize that you can't just tell people what to do if you just want to.

Especially with Captain Beefheart and his Magic Band – he was looking for the weakest guys he could find, I mean: perfect musicians, but teenagers, and he was ten years older which matters a lot at that age. And then locking them up for months.
Yeah, strange methods.

Yeah, but then, again, the results are just great... Machiavelli. [laughing]

Yeah, the things the same musicians did without Beefy just don't have that magic.

It's funny you should bring up Captain Beefheart because I went to Tate Modern and I saw the exhibition of Sigmar Polke – and it's really good!

Ahh, Polke did one big picture and Captain Beefheart is in it, among... I think Beuys, Diedrich Diederichsen,... [I was wrong: I'm not talking about Polke here, but Jörg Immendorffs painting 'Musée d'Art Moderne' (1989), as I found out later...]

Because there was a live Captain Beefheart-tape playing behind one of the films, there was lots of footage of Polke and his friends on a train. It was from the 'Shiny Beast (Bat Chain Puller)' – live. I was like: 'Oh my god, I have to get that again!' 'cause I used to have it, but then I got rid of it – because I thought it was weak. And then I also got 'Strictly Personal' that I'd never heard before, but it's got 'Kandy Korn' on – and I love 'Kandy Korn'! I was reading all the liner notes and it was the first time that I've really digested that Captain Beefheart was pretty mentally ill and wielding a lot of power – but absolutely a musical genius. To come up with those lines, and the counterpoints, and how he managed to explain it with no musical vocabulary.

That's what I also thought was a main difference between Captain Beefheart and Mark E. Smith on one hand, and you on the other: they don't play instruments, but you do. So I guess it's much different for you to articulate what you wanna have from your band.

Oh yeah! I do a lot of recording, my solo stuff, and a lot of it is experimenting and things happen that I can't teach to a band. I could maybe if I tried really hard and sometimes my wife is really good for saying: 'Just try harder – you can do it!'

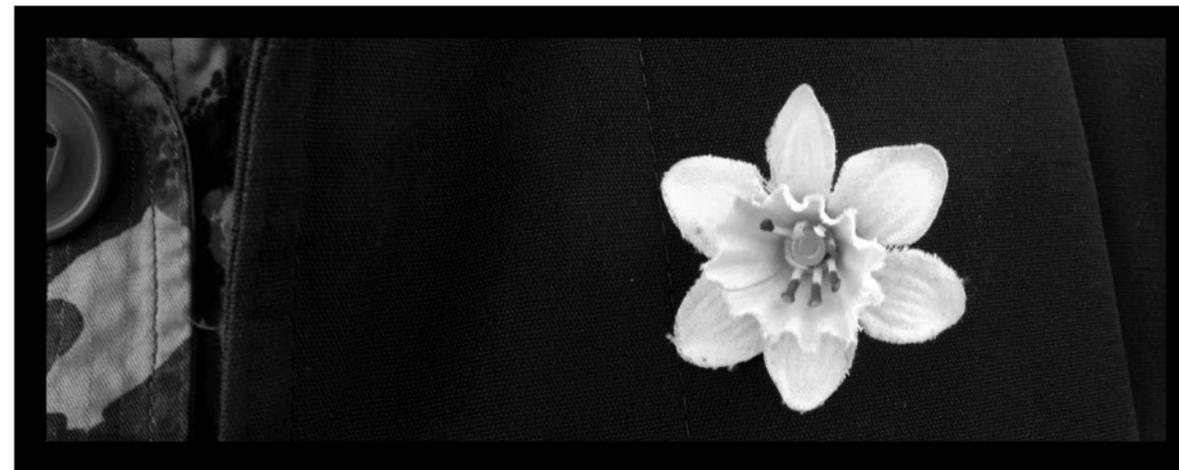
But with the Country Teasers, I decided to just try to write songs that would be easy to teach to other guys and that we could play easily without having to be too good. Pussy Galore was my model. I didn't even know how good Pussy Galore actually even were. I thought what they presented was this mess that was just so aggressive and intimidating, it didn't matter if you played badly. And so that would be an invincible stage presence: If you played a bum note and an audience member laughed, it would be like: 'The joke's one you!' – and it doesn't matter. And a pack of wolves would descend on that audience member and kill them. I spent a long time teaching every member of that band in practices: 'This goes like this.' But all the Country Teasers-songs are so simple that it wasn't too difficult.

But then, you reach the maximum power! There's that clip on youtube of the Country Teasers playing at the Hemlock Tavern in San Francisco with like five guitars...

Yeah, 'Black Change' we are playing, aren't we? It's four or three guitars and a bass.

Yeah, and you hear it and you know: 'All these guitars make sense!' It's got such a power!

I think I did get that from The Fall. There's a period of The Fall I really like, controversially, it's when Brix joined, like 'The Wonderful and Frightening World of The Fall' and 'This



Nation's Saving Grace'. There are these strong guitar lines, and the bass is playing exactly the same. I didn't know that at the time, but when I was writing melodies for the Country Teasers, it was too weak if it was just one guitar. It had to be two at least, and a bass. And suddenly you've got a simple melody being presented in this most powerful form. It's not being undermined. Sometimes if you play a rhythm guitar it undermines that melody, 'cause you're usually playing a chord, and you've got those... stupid harmonics going on... here [using fingers for playing chords on air guitar], like majors and minors that are just messy. I remember, though, at one point, where I was like: 'What are we doing here?! All of us playing the same note! This is gonna be really boring for the audience.' [laughing] But...

No! [laughing]

No!

For me, when I hear that, I wanna get my guitar and join in! [laughing]

Have you heard about the Sleaford Mods?

Yeah, I love the Sleaford Mods!

I think they also got great lyrics.

Oh, incredible lyrics! What he's coming out with – and so many! You just catch one great line and you're already on to the next one. It's like: 'Haaa! I can't catch your breath.' You know that they're supporting The Specials on tour?

Really? That's a weird mix!

I know, it's great, it's great! 'cause Terry Hall likes them.

Yeah, they are really good, also their music! I wish I had brought them up last night, I was having this argument with my friend. He works in the record industry, he sees it at first-hand how banal and boring and crap it is. So much money is put behind so much bad music. He's obviously a bit pissed off with it right now. I was trying to think of good things that are actually happening in music. I'm also a big fan of Deerhoof.

There's always gonna be good stuff, but if you stop and worry about how bad most of everything is, you're never gonna get out of that rut.

Yeah, I absolutely agree! And I'm just thinking about the Sleaford Mods and what we said about age before – they are in their 40s...

Yeah, they're really old.

But I think they needed their time of going through all different kinds of bands and experiences. There's that one great Sleaford Mods line: 'I used to be in bands, fuckin' hated it.'

[laughing] Yeah, he was in indie-bands, in the Oasis-period. At one point, he must have had a big dream that was then crushed – repeatedly.

And from you I read that great line: 'I used to play sax for one or two years, fuckin' hated it.' [laughing]

My parents made me play saxophone. But with saxophone, you start on grade three – you don't do grade one or two. It's hard though! Have you ever played a saxophone?

No, flute. That's where I started. That's grade one... or a half.

[laughing] Yeah, sax is really hard. I did it because I had pneumonia and my parents thought it would be good for my breathing, which is true.

I like to blow it now, just for a kind of a noise. But at the time, the one thing I did like doing was I learned the saxophone solos from Pink Floyd's 'The Final Cut' – which are really good, you know, clichée, emotional. I used to play that. That was my pleasure, the one pleasure I got out of learning the sax. [pause] Awful instrument.

So now, you are putting most of your energy into The Rebel?

Yeah, because with the Country Teasers, we are all over the place. The drummer lives in Bedford and he has his business, he's in catering and in a couple of other bands, and he has a kid – so that's him out. The keyboard player and guitarist – my best friend – he lives in New York and we can't just go over to America and tour anymore like we used to. So he's out, he's got a kid. That leaves my wife, my bass player, the guitarist Alastair and me. My wife's also the drummer when we play live The Rebel, sometimes.

Your wife plays drums like a clockwork, she's amazing.

Ach, she's like a machine! She's the best drummer ever, she's great, yeah.

What if your wife said that what you do is not good enough, your art, your music?

Oh, she has said that sometimes, and it makes me really angry...

[laughing] That's what I thought.

[laughing]... and depressed, too, 'cause I'm like: 'What do I... how... how do I make it any better?! I can't make it any better – this is what it is!'

But when we were playing live a lot, me and my wife, when we kind of first met, there's this one song, 'Kneel, Mulholland: Drive!', that we would play all the time. But I said to her: 'I can't play that live, it's too hard. I can't play the guitar and sing that – so forget that.' And she would say: 'Why don't you just try doing it?' So I would try and say: 'It's too hard, I can't do it!' And she said: 'Just try harder then!' So I would try harder.

That's what she's good at, she's got very high standards, whereas I've got very low standards. And I believe in quantity, not quality. She believes in quality. I've released like 50 albums and some of them are really bad – but she hasn't released any albums.

[laughing]

We've been having a lot of difficult things going on in our lives that means we haven't been able to practice and play – so I've just stripped it down and I play solo as The Rebel. But me and the guitarist, we've been able to get this hobby going: On our days off from work we record Pink Floyd's 'The Wall' and we've got as far as 'Comfortably Numb' – so we finished Side 1, Side 2 and most of Side 3, then we'll be on to Side 4. It's taken about a year and a half. We think we're gonna have it finished by two years, so sometime next year. I would say that is what I put most of my efforts into, apart from The Rebel – 'cause I'm always recording really as The Rebel. You can't stop me.

Typical bedroom recordings?

Typical bedroom recordings.

I wonder if you'll have to pay a huge amount of royalties when you release the Pink Floyd-record.

Well, I don't think so. I think the way it works is that you don't have to pay anything, but if you make money with it, then you have to pay them their royalties. Roger Waters and Dave Gilmour will collect all the royalties from the sales. So you know, we'll just get around that some other way, we'll just bootleg it or...

It's gonna be really funny, something funny is gonna happen because we're telling so many people and we know lots of people, me and Alastair. I think the word is probably just gonna get around and eventually, one day, Roger Waters is gonna have a memo on his desk: 'These guys are doing "The Wall".' 'WHAT?!' And he can slam his fist. And

then the shit will hit the fan – but so what?! I don't care. He can sue us – we haven't got any money, so... [laughing] We'll go to prison, whatever, I don't care. It's really good fun.

Alastair is a painter, he has to do that, and he works really hard, and I've got my job, and I love doing music. But also, there's a fair amount of pressure on it, you know, I have to do something good all the time, I have to be good. But with 'The Wall', already done, we're just copying it, we don't have to worry. If something's too hard, we'll just make something up.

[laughing] Why did you choose 'The Wall'?

'cause we love 'The Wall', we both love 'The Wall'. I think I love it more than him, but he loves it too. It's his idea. And I know it off by heart, I could sing it now off by heart, all the parts 'cause I started listening to it when I was very young. It's a great idea though, because there's so much in 'The Wall', production-wise: planes going by, children's voices, explosions, dramatic acting, and then really big music, too. So yeah, I put a lot of energy into that, but The Rebel is me, I've always been The Rebel, recording, maybe with different names when I was younger, but that's just me, that's what I do. The history of the Country Teasers is that the best songs that I would record and the simplest, I'd teach to the Country Teasers, so it's always really me, just making music, and then it will be a band playing it. I get really angry and defensive when people say 'your side project, The Rebel', because they assume that the Country Teasers is my main thing. But it was never my idea to play live, I just was happy recording and then some other guy said: 'I wanna play drums behind you.' So I said: 'OK'.

But I do think that four people or five playing music together is the best thing because there is a collaboration going on which means that certain ideas... The Rebel is just my ego and I can do whatever I want, but if it's four other people, than that's five minds, all collaborating and editing and saying: 'That's not good enough. Why don't we do that?' And then it becomes more real, more human.

And also a little bit uncontrollable.

Uncontrollable, unpredictable.

Five people together, there are also sounds that come up, that nobody could play alone, but together it's happening.

Yeah, that's it. We'll do that again one day. These gigs come up every now and then where somebody has enough money and persuasion. We played in Paris two years ago, and the same situation as now was kind of defeated. They paid enough money that Robert could fly over to London, we could practice,... 'cause you know, when you're not a real band, you have to practice for a week just to do one gig – which I think is phony bullshit, but if it keeps the band alive, I suppose it's worth doing.

So the Country Teasers never died.

Country Teasers will never die!

What do you think, what would you do if for some reason

you couldn't produce music? Would you go insane, or kill somebody, or take more drugs?

Hmmmm... well, I wouldn't take any more drugs. Errrr... I might kill somebody, I suppose. But... I mean, would I be able to draw? 'cause I like drawing, and writing, I'm writing my novel...

No, no artistic sublimation.

Yeah! [laughing] I don't know. If you'd asked me that question even three years ago, I would have been like: 'Absolutely out of the question.' But now I'm like: 'This is pretty cool, I like sitting around, looking at the sky.' I think I don't know the answer to the question until it actually happens. I get very depressed if I don't make any music for a long time. It's like a practice that I have to do, a bit like eating, breathing, or sleeping.

I know that feeling. It's not necessarily music for me, but if I don't produce anything, I get depressed.

It's difficult because I can then get into a really negative frame of mind where I question myself and I say: 'But why? Why?! What's the point?! There's no point in doing this music stuff. It's not making me any richer.' You don't even know if it's any good. And so then, I get really stuck, because then I don't do any music or any creativity, and then I get more depressed. Really, I think when you have that feeling, it's a sign. You have to get up and just go directly to the piano or the typewriter and just do it, because unfortunately, art in our culture is practically frowned upon, it's like meaningless rubbish. You're supposed to be a plumber or a footballer. There's no hardcore justification for being an artist, like the alarm doesn't go off at 9am and you put on your suit and go to your art factory and make the art. It's all on you. Kippenberger actually said: 'When you wake up in the morning as an artist, it's really hard. You have to...' I can't remember what his image is, but it's a bit like: 'You have to get your machete out and you have to hack through the jungle.' And there's nobody telling you that what you're doing is right. There's no reason why you're doing it – you just have to do it. 'cause if you don't do it, like you say, you feel depressed. But it's so easy to then argue yourself out of it, like saying: 'What you're doing is worthless – don't bother!'

So... yeah, you just have to do it really, hey.

But then it's stupid, the whole thing is just stupid, because of the amount of pleasure that you get when you do it, right? I mean it's an incredible amount of pressure – total bliss. When it goes well. Actually, there is a certain amount of fear. Often, I'm working on a song and it doesn't go very well. And then I really feel bad.

Do you throw them away then or keep them in line?

I try and work on it, and then sometimes, if it's really not working, I throw it away. I erase it.

But sometimes something just takes longer, to figure it out.

Yeah, but with my music, I've got a melody that I'm starting off with, and that's something that I just came up with and I recorded it. So I know that that melody is a good melody, and then I have to try and make it into a song. At a certain point, I'm just killing it, I'm just killing the melody and I've gotten really far away from what it was when I first made it up. So I don't think it works to just keep working on it. It's like I've taken a wrong turn somewhere in the process.

Sometimes I think about the songs that actually have worked. It's luck that they worked, 'cause all the decisions I made about what kind of drums I played and what kind of guitar sound – these were all just little at the moment decisions.

But nobody sees or hears all the failed experiments, they never get out.

No, but how do you or I know that one of the failed experiments in a parallel universe is not actually number one in the charts? It could have been, because instead of making all the wrong decisions and ending up being in the bin, I could have made correct decisions and it could have ended up very well. Because every song starts out exactly the same, with just a little note on a walkman. [pause] It's just all luck, really. And hard work. [pause] And being a genius.

[laughing]

Yeah, you gotta be a genius. [laughing]

