



# Name-Dropping

Four years ago Birmingham four-piece Ocean Colour Scene were just another faceless indie band, with a debut album they couldn't give away. Times have indeed changed.

"The album's just gone in at Number 2 behind Take That," explains a triumphant Simon Fowler on the success of the band's new album, *Moseley Shoals*. "So that was quite a surprise. Christ almighty, if somebody had told me six months ago our album would go in at Number 2, I would have laughed. And if Take That hadn't split up, we'd have gone in at Number 1. Bizarre."

So, what do you owe this unexpected success to? "People's good taste," the singer laughs throatily. "The singles have been played a bit on TV, and they've done well. When we put out 'The Riverboat Song', we put out what we thought was a particularly uncommercial record. All we wanted to do was surprise people, and bang, it went to Number 15. It was the same with 'You've Got it Bad'. The record company was very nervous about putting it out, but we insisted, as it was different to 'The Riverboat Song', and bang, it went up to Number 7. So, our planned strategy to keep a bit underground all went wrong, and here we are at Number 2."

*Moseley Shoals* is a good album. It's a robust and melodic trip across timeless influences like Hendrix, Free, the Faces, and through styles ranging from the obvious R&B of 'The Riverboat Song', to the folkier strains of 'Lining Your Pockets' and 'Fleeting Mind'. The Auteurs' Luke Haines believes pop consumerism has been taken over by 14-year-old kids, so, has this age group

been responsible for *Moseley Shoals*' success?

"Yeah, we've done some signing sessions, and I'm amazed at how many kids are into it, so maybe they've been talking about us in their schools. When we started touring three months ago, the average age of the audience would be about 18 to 30. Now the front rows are all teenage kids, so the average age has halved since we've gone on TV. That's a bit weird, as I would say our music isn't in tune with 14-year-old girls."

But for most kids the band's R&B leanings would be something new.

"Maybe, I find it interesting that many people pick up on this R&B thing so much, because I think there's as much folk music on the album, and songs like 'The Circle' and 'The Day We Caught the Train' haven't much of either R&B or folk. The album has a variety of styles."

The same couldn't be said of OCS's bloodless, eponymous first album. Legendary Rolling Stones' producer Jimmy Miller had been hired to produce it. What did he see in their typically anonymous indie sound back then he wanted to deal with?

"I don't know because, in the end, he couldn't really deal with it because he was drinking himself to death slowly. We became very close to Jimmy. His wife died of cancer while he was working with us, and he had to get his son out of prison in the States. Loads of things were happening with

Jimmy that were unbelievable.

"When we started working with Jimmy the sound was an awful lot closer to what we do now than what the first album ended up sounding like. It got mangled in the process of going through a nightmare record company situation, and using different producers, and losing the plot."

The band's rediscovery of the plot owes something to Fowler's raw, natural R&B vocals, with 'The Riverboat Song' being a perfect example of the power of a shredded throat.

"You mean it sounds like I smoke too much," coughs Fowler. "As a singer, most vocalists I speak to are very self-conscious about their own vocals. They're always trying to get them turned down in the mix. So, it's been difficult because I never think I'm as good a singer on record as I am live, and I sometimes don't like the sound of my own voice. But sometimes I surprise myself and think: 'Yeah, that sounds good.'"

Ocean Colour Scene would be the first to admit their current popularity has been achieved with a little help from their friends, namely Paul Weller and Oasis. Guitarist Steve Cradock became a key member of Weller's band, and the other three Scenes were eventually roped in.

"Steve has always been a huge Weller and Jam fan. Paul has been influenced by a style of music similar to us, which is why it has been so easy to find an affinity with him. Intrinsic in Steve's play-

ing, there is Paul's influence, but we've influenced him as well. *Stanley Road* sounds more like the music we make than the first Paul Weller album. Half of our band are playing on the album. It's just Paul is far more famous than we are, so people will think we've ripped him off. But playing with him has helped us as a live band. We did a gig the other day at the Virgin Megastore in Oxford Street, and Paul played keyboards for us. We had a good response."

Still name-dropping, and Noel Gallagher of Oasis has been touting OCS as his favourite band.

"We're good friends with Oasis. We knew them before they became big time, playing in a pub supporting a band from Scotland called Whiteout in front of 200 people. We met them, got on with them, and for them it's got amazing. They're a great bunch of people and they're doing well in the States, and that bodes well for bands like ourselves. We've played in the States before, and we've gone down well, and I know Oasis have been name-checking us all over the shop in the States."

"Noel gave us a signed photo the other day, and wrote on it: 'To the second greatest band in England.'"

No prizes for guessing who's the first.

"It must be Take That, 'cause they're Number 1," laughs Fowler. Nice call.

Ocean Colour Scene have arrived at the gates of rock 'n' roll heaven without much help from the press. *NME* gave *Moseley Shoals* a miserly five out of 10, under the cryptic heading *PW Hell*, whatever that means.

"*Paul Weller Hell*," explains Fowler bitterly. "But I think it's a play on words which means *PWL*, which is Peter Waterman Ltd., the bloke who's behind the Stock, Aitken and Waterman stuff at the end of the 80s."

That's a bit obscure.

"Yeah, and what's it got to do with us? And didn't Ted Kessler [the *NME* reviewer] used to be in the Gestapo? It's a very SS name. It's his opinion, but I value my opinion far higher than his. Apart from which, what does it matter what he says when we've gone in at Number 2? So, fuck him: And when he finds out where we've gone in, then he can explain why Britain's most important music mag has failed to back a band like ourselves, who can only be good for British music."

"They're just into polemics, and these mags just wanna stir up trouble. And when you meet these people, they know jack shit about music. And they're wankers, and we're never going to talk to that paper again. I'll tell you what's interesting about that review, it's the front cover."

The picture of the Stone Roses and news of the split?

"Yeah, and what's the other bands they mention? They mention us, don't they? They do that to sell the magazine, then they stab us in the back. So, fuck them, we're never doing another interview with them or *Melody Maker* again. What you learn is, the music press in Britain is the lowest form of human existence. And most people think that, it's universally despised."

Fowler is an ex-journalist. Fact.

GEORGE KAY

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