

"DON'T BLAME  
YOUR WONKY  
CAMERA ON MY HAT"



# CAN STAND ME NOW

After drugs, splits, prison and more drugs, The Libertines are back. But will it just be comeback gigs? Sam Rowe finds out

PHOTOGRAPHY: ROGER SARGENT

**P**ete Doherty is late. Singer, tabloid botherer and Britain's most documented drug addict; to say the Babyshambles frontman's reputation precedes him would be something of an understatement. Today alone I've been informed Doherty made the 1,000-mile journey from his Hamburg home to Glasgow in the driver's seat of a camper van, and that his last known whereabouts was in the city centre, where he asked a stranger if she'd let him buy her dog. (She declined.)

Now, after spending nearly an hour waiting in a hotel lobby for Pete (or Peter, as he now prefers to go by), a fire alarm is triggered by someone smoking in the building, which sees me venture outside with Carl Barat, John Hassall and Gary Powell – the other three-quarters of Doherty's freshly reformed band, The

Libertines. They're waiting too, and are due on stage at Glasgow's Barrowland Ballroom in just under 30 minutes, for their second consecutive warm-up show ahead of their money-spinning Hyde Park gig on 5 July (at the time of writing we don't know if it was a success or shambolic failure).

"Hmm, I wonder who's responsible," smirks bassist John, joining the dots between the fire alarm and his Awol bandmate. "Fireman Sam?" offers Libs' drummer, Gary.

Ten years has passed since The Libertines split – amid drug addictions, burglaries, spells at Her Majesty's Pleasure and security having to stop Pete and Carl knocking each other's teeth out. Yet some things, it seems, haven't changed at all.

## RESURRECTION

Twenty-four hours previously and the scene threatened a

similar story. Some questioned why The Libertines – a chaotic rock'n'roll collective birthed in London – would choose Glasgow to stage their rebirth. But, along with the fact Barrowlands is found down the road from The Libertine pub and just off Albion Street – a raucous Scottish crowd could be just the tonic to mask first-night jitters or bum notes from a band who haven't played together in a decade (bar a special guest slot at Reading and Leeds Festival 2010), and couldn't soundcheck as co-frontman Pete (who else) was nowhere to be found. As it hits 9.30pm, 15 minutes after they should've been on stage, the crowd is growing anxious. "I've been to entire shows he's not turned up to," one fan says of Doherty. "They'll be great, it's all about the chemistry between Pete and Carl," claims another, "...and how many drugs Pete has taken today."

Luckily, a full-scale riot is averted as the band appear on stage at an almost punctual 9.32pm. Rattling through a frantic two-hour, 25-song set, The Libertines are reborn. Sure, it's rough round the edges – *Time For Heroes* has to be restarted and Doherty occasionally goes off-piste by jamming entirely on his own – but the young crowd, many of whom would have been in primary school when the band's last album came out, don't mind one bit.

Crowd interaction is kept largely to a minimum – though Pete does try to reunite a fan with their lost iPhone, after first pausing for a selfie with Carl, and a bleary-eyed bald man storms the stage, almost on cue, during *What A Waster*. Yet all the warm, winning hallmarks of old are there, like Carl and Pete using the same microphone for their vocals and sharing a tender embrace at the end. ➔

➔ "It was a belter, I'm still buzzing," beams Carl the next day, sipping camomile tea in the hotel café. "It's like putting on a new pair of shoes. We went through such an intense period together, that whenever we reconnect we're kind of mellifluous – it's like nothing's ever changed. We all know each other and all relationships are as they were, and hopefully there's a lot of water under the bridge, so there won't be as many hiccups... touch wood."

Romantic grandeur of old friends burying the hatchet aside, The Libertines copped a fair amount of abuse upon announcing their ever-expanding return. Lucrative comeback gigs are by no means a new enterprise, with everyone from The Stone Roses to Monty Python supplementing their retirement funds by getting the old gang back together. And while the Hyde Park show is rumoured to net Pete and Carl a cool £500k each, it's not like the band's been short of offers. Granted, sharp-minded music fans will point to a similar reunion just four years ago, but then they also turned down playing the Olympics closing ceremony in 2012. So, why now?

"It just feels right, man," explains Barat. "There's no real rhyme or reason for it – there was a Libertines-shaped hole in our lives."

"You can bang on about finances, but Arctic Monkeys – did they give their money from Finsbury Park to charity? Kings Of Leon, Arcade Fire – I don't know why it's always us that get f\*cking shot down for that. We smashed our faces in and went to prison for our art, I don't think we don't deserve to get paid at some point."



THE LIBERTINES, LEFT TO RIGHT: GARY POWELL, PETE DOHERTY, CARL BARAT, JOHN HASSALL

## CREATIVE DIFFERENCES

**Morrissey vs Johnny Marr**  
The lacerating lead singer of The Smiths claimed that he "never wanted to go solo" – but guitarist Marr had other ideas. In 1987 Marr bought a one-way ticket to LA and cut off all contact with Moz and the rest of the band. Even when The Smiths' drummer Mike Joyce later sued the band over royalties in the Nineties, the pair refused to buddy up. They're still not on speaking terms.



"NO, I LOVE IT MORE"

**Jimmy Page vs Robert Plant**  
Led Zeppelin was Page's band – until Plant's solo success tipped the balance of power in his favour. The pair have bickered ever since, most recently over (another) reunion: "He's just playing games," seethed Page, "and I'm fed up with it to be honest with you. I don't sing, so I can't do much about it." "I'm not part of a jukebox," smirked Plant.



"NOPE, I WON'T EVEN LOOK AT THE SAME CAMERA AS YOU"

**Slash vs Axl Rose**  
It's fair to say that Guns N' Roses lead singer Axl Rose polarises opinion. His 20-year feud with guitarist Slash peaked in 2009 when Rose called Slash a "cancer". Slash's wife then publicly mocked Rose's weight. "He hates my guts," conceded Slash recently.



SIDEBAR WORDS: TOM BAILEY; ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHS: GETTY; RE: FEATURES; NEELAM KHAN VELA

sourced band The Jackals all rose from the ashes of the band. Each member is a dad now, too, with John a practising Buddhist and Carl learning to drive just this year. No longer twentysomething scoundrels, they're now way into their thirties and, in Gary's case, forties. And that's before you even mention the flecks of grey – from Gary's beard to Pete's dishevelled mane. You never know, it might just be this middle-aged maturity that prevents The Libertines coming apart at the seams once more.

"I think being a dad has taught us all a bit of patience," admits Carl. "Personally it's made me value what's great in life and not want to f\*ck it up any more. Realising that life is short, and wasting my time with all these fall-outs and bollocks that gets in the way of actually making something beautiful."

Patience is something the band will require in abundance if they really are to make Libertines 2.0 a success. With recently announced Alexandra Palace shows coming hot off the heels of an autumn European jaunt – their first taste of

the tour bus since 2004 – there's even talk of a new album. Doherty recently described this as "the dream", but even if the band can keep it on the straight and narrow, John now lives in Denmark while Pete's in Hamburg, leaving only Carl and Gary in London. Might this be the first Libertines album produced exclusively via Skype?

"I can't see us as a Skype kind of band," laughs John. "I think we'll have to choose somewhere in the middle [to record], like Switzerland." "I doubt it," adds Barat, "we're still in the world of typewriters."

### SHOWTIME

Back, kerbside, in Glasgow, and there's still no sign of Pete Doherty, a mere five minutes before showtime. Carl, Gary and John have since lost patience and bundled into a cab to the venue, leaving The Libertines renaissance dangling by a thread after just one show. But, just as it seems the Loch Ness Monster is more likely to surface than The Libertines tonight, a tired, slightly grey individual emerges from the hotel,

### "THE ONLY REHEARSALS WE HAD WERE DRUNKEN ONES AT TWO O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING IN THE SQUARE"

clasping a cocktail. It's Doherty, all right. I'm told he's been asleep for most of the afternoon, including through the 10-minute fire alarm.

Leisurely strolling towards a taxi, Pete sports matted hair, a thick neck chain and long-term girlfriend Katia on his arm. His people usher me into the back too, for what I imagine will be a drive to the venue at warp speed, or there's every chance the band will be late. Pete doesn't seem to be in a hurry. Some things never change.

Finally granted time with the elusive musician, I ask Pete how it feels to be back gigging with his old friend Carl. "Er... I thought you just needed a lift?" comes Doherty's reply. Not only is he unaware of our interview, the singer seems to think I'm an opportunistic hitchhiker.

### "YOU CAN BANG ON ABOUT FINANCES, BUT DID ARCTIC MONKEYS GIVE THEIR FINSBURY PARK MONEY TO CHARITY?"

rehearsing for the current raft of shows. And though not much in the way of practise materialised, it's clear the trip was beneficial in healing old wounds.

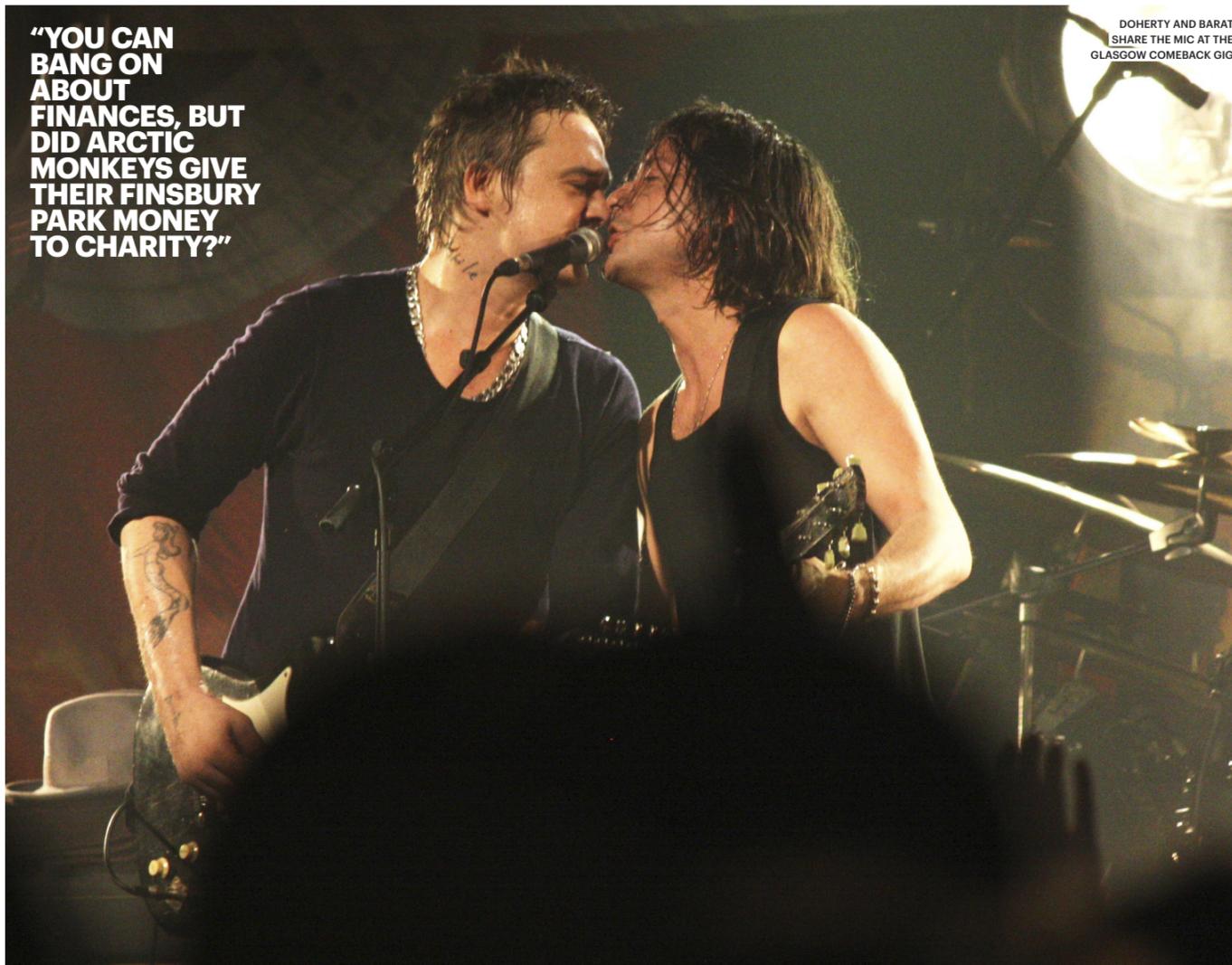
"It was like being kids again," gushes Carl. "There was no one to play up for, nothing. It was just us and the music, the fields and a few bars. We were right on the outskirts in this old factory with a whole floor – bunk beds, like The Beatles in Hamburg."

"That's what's really important, just spending time for the love of each other. It's very easy to get weighed down with the endless headlines, but all of that just evaporates – without anyone there you're just friends, and you start to wonder if any of it's real."

"It was great," adds drummer, Gary. "Admittedly we didn't get as much done as we would've liked to, but what we missed in performance we gained in touching base, which was equally important – if not more so – as, if all this fails, the last thing I want is for us not to be friends any more. We started off as friends, we were all buddies from around the way, and that, for me, is really important."

Since their acrimonious parting in 2004, it's been far from a quiet decade for the Libertines alumni. As well as Carl and Pete's respective solo offerings – Babyshambles, Dirty Pretty Things, Yeti, The April Rainers and Barat's new Facebook-

DOHERTY AND BARAT SHARE THE MIC AT THE GLASGOW COMEBACK GIG



Credentials eventually assured, I quiz Pete on his and Carl's recent city break to Barcelona, where Doherty was showcasing his artwork. Was it nice to catch up?

"It was amazing, yeah," he says. "I couldn't believe it, to be honest. It was... really surprising. He's a lot more accepting now, a lot more in tune with his own feelings. He talks to me now in a way he never did."

Doherty's soft tones scarcely register over the snarl of the taxi's engine, as we hurtle towards the venue. Soundchecks haven't quite gone to plan this weekend, I say, how was Barcelona for rehearsals?

"The only rehearsals we had were drunken ones at two o'clock in the morning in the square," Pete grins. "Wholly unappreciated as well, by the supposedly party-loving Spanish – chucking pints of water out the window on us on to the square. I don't know what Spanish for 'P\*ss off, I'm trying to sleep' is, but I could find out."

I spy The Libertine pub out the corner of my eye. We're near, and it's apparent this will be the most fleeting of meetings with Doherty. I ask him the same as Carl – you're dads now, are you coming to this with a newfound maturity?

"If you mean 'are we all f\*cking obsessed with age and extremely fretful about it'... I think Carl is," Pete sniggers. "He's the only one who dyes his hair. But he forgot to dye his beard. Jiggles, so he ain't fooling anyone, know what I'm saying? If you notice, the lights are quite dark on his side of the stage."

"For so many years now I've been centre stage – frontman in Babyshambles, frontman in my solo shows, obviously," Doherty continues. "So it's strange having to wander over to the flanks for my vocals. People used to think it was a sign of brotherly connection when we shared the mic, but it was just vying for that centre spot."

The cab rolls to a stop, outside the exceptionally unglamorous back entrance of the Barrowland Ballroom. The tour manager is awaiting Pete's arrival by the door, as are a couple of smartphone-toting fans. As he reaches for the car door – I have just one more question: this is chaos, right? Can the band *really* make this work?

"We used to say it was organised chaos," Pete smiles, dragging himself out of the car. "It wasn't. It's always been chaos." **S**

The Libertines play Alexandra Palace on 27 & 28 Sept (axs.com), and tour Europe from 30 Sept