



Striking a chord: Jarvis Cocker in iconic corduroys

Sad goodbye to cool Britannia

JARVIS Cocker is at home in his apartment in Paris.

"I have been lying down for the previous three interviews, but now I've got up because I've decided I want a cup of green tea," the 40-something singer says in his memorable Yorkshire accent. It's amazing how this artist, who spearheaded the Britpop movement with his band Pulp in the 1990s, can make something mundane sound quirky and eccentric.

It's his talent. Songs about meeting up with old crushes in the year 2000 or taking rich girls to supermarkets captivated a generation in the 1990s.

Cocker, who grew up in the northern English town of Sheffield, turned thick-rimmed spectacles, corduroy pants and jackets into a fashion statement, lyrical witticism into an art form, and was never short of a quote for the hungry British press. To this day, the artist is still a thinking-person's pop star and has hosted documentaries, edited radio shows and been interviewed on political program *Question Time* in the UK.

He has just released his second post-Pulp solo album *Further Complications*, which has been garnering great reviews for its middle-aged wit and wisdom and "muscular" sound.

Cocker was last in Australia performing at the V Festival, in a show that was as much stand-up as it was good music, and he returns for a series of concerts this December.

On *Further Complications* he has furthered that sense of humour on songs such as *Caucasian Blues* and *Leftovers*, in which he sings about the "surplus love" his "failing" body has to offer.

Rather than tales of young love in the supermarket, Cocker, 46, is singing about meeting women in the Museum of Palaeontology with memorable chat-up lines like: "I wanna love you whilst we both still have flesh upon our bones, before we both become extinct".

"I've never really written particularly upbeat and carefree words,

Quirky Jarvis Cocker reminisces about the Britpop era with Sally Browne

because I just hate happy songs; they depress me," Cocker says now, sipping his green tea.

"The songs of a 46-year-old are different to a 20-year-old in that the life experience and the insights that you gain tend to be slightly more depressing," he says, finishing his sentence with a hearty chuckle.

"I guess that's why pop music is traditionally supposed to be the preserve of younger people because it's all about the discovery of things – that first flush of youth.

"I'm not in the first flush of anything, but I still think it's important to be questioning things and trying to work out what you think about things, and I guess that's what I'm trying to do."

Cocker was hardly in the first flush of youth when Pulp became cover stars in the 1990s. He had been recording with Arabacus Pulp, as they were initially called, since he was a teenager.

He was more than 30 when Pulp's *His 'N' Hers* album became an indie hit, which was then followed by the mainstream smash *Different Class*.

The single *Common People*, about a rich girl who wants to learn about how the other half lives – intimately – was a huge hit that catapulted Pulp to the forefront of popular culture.

At the time, Cocker knew he had an important song on his hands. Although Pulp didn't yet have a full album ready, he felt he had to release the song immediately – that took much wrangling and convincing of the record company.

"I was aware that for the first time I'd written something that seemed to be for whatever reason relevant to that particular time that it was written, so I became very convinced that it had to be released as soon as possible otherwise it would miss its moment," he says.

"Pulp had always been massively

out of step. I'd been in Pulp already for 10 years at that point and it had always been out of sync with what was going on in pop music – so it was really weird to suddenly think 'Wow, this song, it's its moment, it says something about this time'. I can't say exactly what it said, but it just seemed appropriate."

He was right. It was a hit, an instant classic, and the album went to No. 1.

Britpop is back in the news again after mainstays of the scene Blur got back together and their arch-rivals Oasis split up.

But Cocker, who felt that Pulp were always outsiders, says the period of cool Britannia wasn't much to celebrate.

"In a way I think it's a sad period. I know that's a bad thing to say because I was involved in it.

The thing that was exciting was that the mainstream was taking note of indie (independent) music, but what Britpop ended up being was a half-arsed rehash of the '60s, people playing jangly guitar music. So it's sad that the last major

What Britpop ended up being was a half-arsed rehash of the '60s

musical movement in British history was a revival. "That's the start of what we're seeing so much of now. It seems in the UK it's turning into an anniversary culture. It's the 40th anniversary of Woodstock or of Sgt. Pepper's coming out. And the biggest news is that you can play Beatles songs on an Xbox. I've not had a go on it, I probably will have a go on it.

"So although the technology moves on, the actual content of things seems to have stalled. Just at the moment when the ultimate high definition (TV) has occurred there's nothing actually worth looking at."

If it all sounds too depressing, you may as well have a laugh.

Jarvis Cocker performs at the Hi-Fi, Brisbane, on December 5.

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