

On his latest album stylish rock legend Paul Weller makes a stand against mediocrity, writes **Sally Browne**

HE HAS written tracks that have inspired generations, been credited with kicking off the mod revival movement, and scored countless hits in his native UK with his bands The Jam, The Style Council and as a solo artist.

So how does one address someone of the stature of Paul Weller (pictured), the "Modfather"? Does he need a special honorific? His Modness, perhaps?

"No, sir is fine," the 52-year-old says, good-naturedly from his London flat "on a beautiful, beautiful summer's day".

The artist who wrote tracks including *Going Underground* and *Town Called Malice* was recently honoured with a string of dates at the prestigious Albert Hall in London where he went through his enormous back catalogue, sometimes playing 31-song sets.

Pretty soon he will be honouring his Australian fans when he tours in October.

But Weller, who has retained his position as a successful solo artist since the 1990s, is not resting on his past success. He has just released his tenth solo album *Wake Up the Nation*, which went to No.2 in Britain. Comprised of 16 short and varied songs, it doesn't give the listener a moment to become bored.

The title, he says, is a call to arms against the mediocrity overtaking Britain.

"I can't comment on other people's countries, that would be unfair. But I just think we settle for second best in



The Modfather

this country. I just think the media, the TV, the radio is at an all-time low. It's all lowest common denominator.

"Second-best becomes the standard really, it becomes what people accept and expect and it's really sad. I think the whole celebrity culture thing is rubbish. It sends out a really negative message."

Weller has a go at modern pastimes too. The title track features the lyrics: "Get your face off the Facebook and turn off your phone."

"Maybe if you're 14 or 16 it might have some value or some relevance," he says. "But everyone's doing it, really."

"There are always benefits to

technology, obviously. But I think also there's a certain element of humanism that gets lost along the way."

One element of pop culture Weller does have an interest in, however, is fashion. With their dapper suits and neat shoes, The Jam were a sartorial as well as musical influence to a generation of bands.

Weller's friend and fan Liam Gallagher, formerly of Oasis, recently started a fashion line, Pretty Green, and invited the Modfather to design some clothes for it.

Weller wore one of the Pretty Green suits at his Albert Hall gigs.

While he hasn't begun any designs just yet, Weller says it's something

he's always had an interest in. Rather than wearing the ripped clothes of their punk contemporaries, The Jam went for more stylish attire.

"We used to get our suits made up at this little tailor's that is long gone now, just behind Carnaby St, which on reflection were absolutely shocking really, because you'd wear them once on stage and you'd get them dry-cleaned and they'd shrink – to a size where they'd fit a chimp."

"And then we had some Jam shoes made up at a place called Shellys. We used to get stuff made up because you couldn't find it at that time, you had to get it made, really."

While those Jam outfits would probably now be considered collec-

I think the whole celebrity culture thing is rubbish. It sends out a really negative message

tor's items, they have since disappeared into rock history.

"It's gone to the ether along the way. Probably a lot of it was lost or stolen, or was just thrown away because it was so shrunken you couldn't wear it anyway."

Weller is friends with both of Oasis's Gallagher brothers, whose split last year was allegedly exacerbated when older brother Noel poked fun at Liam's clothing label.

"They are very different, what can I say? Well, they're both lovely, they're both my friends, so I have to be careful what I say, really."

"Liam has got his own very definite vision of the world, of how the world works and his place in it. And I can't say what that is because I couldn't even hazard a guess, but he has got it anyway."

"And I guess you could say Noel's a bit more down to earth. No, he's a lot more down to earth."

"I love to hear Liam's theories on life. It's different. It's like listening to an ancient philosopher. I think he's really fascinating."

When Weller comes to Australia in October he promises a mix of old and new songs. And with more than 20 studio albums to his name, there will be plenty to choose from.

"When we started rehearsing for the English shows we rehearsed over 50 songs, which was pretty mind-boggling. But it worked out good because we can dip in and out of this pool of songs. The new stuff all sounds great live as well."

Paul Weller performs at The Tivoli, Brisbane, October 19-20; tickets 132 849.

Pendulum swings with style change

The former Perth rockers turned dance act head home, writes **Sally Browne**

EVERYTHING is musical fair game for a group like Pendulum.

The London-based dance act recently remixed a version of the old ABC news theme.

It's what they grew up listening to in Perth, explains the band's frontman, Rob Swire.

"It was a thing that we grew up hearing every night on the news and in the morning when your dad would turn the TV on," he says. "We talked about remixing it for about six years. It was always something that we joked about."

Next the band will be getting their hands on Jeff Wayne's *War of the Worlds* for a special remix of the 1978 work.

In the meantime, they've got their third album to promote – *Immersion* which, as well as being a No.3 record in this country, was a No.1 smash in the UK.

The group, who relocated to England in 2002, have a huge

following over there and recently played a 10,000-strong concert at London's Wembley Arena.

It was an overwhelming experience. When they looked out into the crowd they saw "a crowd the size of a small football stadium acting like a nightclub", says Swire.

"It was so insane that we couldn't actually take the experience in properly. My manager afterwards goes, 'How was that, mate?' And I said, 'Dude, it was too big'. And he got quite offended at the time. He said, 'What do you mean it was too big?' I just meant it was such a sensory overload that we didn't have time to realise what we were doing. It was immense."

While Pendulum owe much of their sound to the drum 'n' bass scene of London, they originally started out as a rock band.

"Drum 'n' bass was the first electronic music that had the right aggressive energy to what we had



playing in our band before," Rob explains.

On *Immersion* they mix things up even more – the record features a collaboration with Liam Howlett of the Prodigy as well as Swedish metal band In Flames.

The gang got to know Howlett on the festival circuit and started talking to him at Big Day Out. They worked on the track, *Immunize*, back and forth via email before Howlett came into the studio for the finishing touches.

The group returns to Australia to tour in October and November. In the meantime, they've got the UK and European festivals to cover.

"I'm most excited about doing

Reading Festival in the UK – it'll be the biggest slot we've ever played. We're headlining the second stage. For a festival of that proportion it's pretty daunting but we've got a few tricks lined up."

So is Swire, who grew up in Zimbabwe before moving to Perth with his family, happy to be an honorary Londoner?

"I don't really like the London life at all," he says. "I like working in London. London's got such a vibrant culture. Scenes over there can be born and die every two weeks. You've got all these new genres of music. Drum 'n' bass when it was first around and then dubstep just recently and grime ... There's

Mixing it: Pendulum are (from left) Ben Mount, Paul Harding, Rob Swire, Gareth McGrillen and Perry ap Gwynedd. Front: Kevin Joseph Sawka

people inventing these genres and then it will catch on. It's quite healthy and it doesn't seem to happen anywhere else in the world."

But hang on Rob, didn't you say you didn't like the London life?

"The lifestyle's s---. The weather's s---. The place is too crowded. It's not a very good place to go out. If you're talking lifestyle, Perth beats it any day of the week."

Pendulum appeared on the international radar with their last album, *In Silico*. The album received UK attention, but Swire says their Australian fan base is fast catching up. They're hoping that this Australian tour will consolidate their reputation here. When you write music of such international appeal, it's impossible to predict where your strongest fan base will be.

"It's really quite random, to be honest," says Swire. "You go somewhere like Finland or Vienna or Slovenia and you can be massive in those places, and the minute you come to Germany or Sweden you get a proper reality smackdown."

Pendulum play the Tivoli, Brisbane, on November 3 and 4. Tickets: ticketek.com.au or 132 849