
BIG ISSUE FROM THE VAULT

ARCHIVE MUSIC SPECIAL

FEATURING

ARCTIC MONKEYS

WHEN JARVIS MET BOWIE

SONIC YOUTH'S THURSTON MOORE

THE SPECIALS

JONNY MARR AND BLONDIE



MUSIC

ARCTIC MONKEYS

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ARCTIC MONKEYS

BEHIND THE SCENES

A slow-burning psychedelic sci-fi chanson masterpiece inspired by Serge Gainsbourg, The Beach Boys, 1970s movie soundtracks and outer space, Arctic Monkeys' Mercury Prize-nominated sixth album *Tranquility Base Hotel & Casino* is one of the finest albums of 2018, and the Sheffield band's boldest and most ambitious artistic statement to date.

As they embark on the UK leg of their world tour, they came to The Big Issue to offer an exclusive, never-before-seen set of behind-the-scenes photographs taken by their friend Zackery Michael - on the road, during video shoots and in-and-around the studio in France where the record came together. The Big Issue is the only place you can see these images, although more visual content from these sessions will feature in exhibitions staged in Sheffield and London to coincide with the tour, including a version of the sculpture from the album's cover, conceived and created by frontman Alex Turner.

Turner also spoke to us to share some funny and revealing stories and insights, providing a candid and personal sub rosa glimpse of one of Britain's most important bands during the latest exhilarating phase of their career.

"We're always happy to work with The Big Issue," says Turner.

Thanks Alex, the feeling's mutual.

Words: Alex Turner in conversation with Malcolm Jack
Images: Zackery Michael

On photographer Zackery Michael

"Zackery took a lot of photographs of us over the last six years or so. He's a friend I made when I was living in New York and he lived in the same neighbourhood. At a certain point we ended up in the same city. We were on a video shoot for The Hellcat Spangled Shalalala from *Suck it and See*, and Zack had just got into town so he joined us and just started taking pictures. We've spent a lot of time with him on tour ever since and he's someone that everyone feels really comfortable with. I suppose that's why he gets the photographs he gets. He's more behind the scenes than we let a lot of people."



L-R
Matt Helders (drums), **Alex Turner** (lead vocals, guitar, piano), **Nick O'Malley** (bass guitar, backing vocals), **Jamie Cook** (guitar)

"They are enormous trousers. A friend gave me those, they were too small for him. He's taller. They're miles too big for me. I suppose there's a bit more room in the trousers of this record, shall we say, than there was in the last one. Is that the quintessential *Tranquility Base Hotel & Casino* trouser? No, it's more of a good studio trouser. Very comfortable."

On Arctic Monkeys' instant classic BBC session at Maida Vale Studios, London, June 2018

"There's Jamie (Cook), and Matthew (Helders) with a drumstick in his mouth, as though it were a rose. I have to say, for that Maida Vale session, I have to give credit to the BBC for letting us do it how we wanted to do it. They really were supportive of that idea. Obviously the video we did for [I Bet You Look Good On The] Dancefloor was a sort of version of that attempt at something in the spirit of *The Old Grey Whistle Test*. Around the time when we did the Four Out of Five video, we'd rented these old cameras and these old monitors and we were messing around with pointing the film camera at the monitor and creating these kind of loops. I think that was where that started. I think with Maida Vale you don't need to do a lot in there, it's just the room looks cool anyway, there's a feel to it. All that *Whistle Test* was was a band set up and they play. You still watch it now and it works. So we went in there with that sort of attitude. And of course we had Ben [Chappell], he directed the BBC thing with some of their people. He deserves more credit than I do."



"It's rare to get asked for an autograph these days I suppose, it's all selfies. It's like using the old cameras for our videos - I insist upon it. I don't, I'm just pulling your leg. But I've had a lot of practice with my autograph over the years, it's absolutely formidable now."



On touring *Tranquility Base Hotel & Casino*

"I suppose it's always with some uncertainty that you release something new, and this was no different. There was a greater sense of uncertainty for a number of reasons, but that seems quite a long time ago now. We've got Tom [Rowley] and Tyler [Parkford] playing with us now as well, and that creates a bit more scope and versatility with the show. I'm really happy with the band now and how it's sounding. It feels like there's something that's there this time that wasn't there before."



"That's in Reno, Nevada, when we were doing the *Tranquility Base* video. It's actually a part that you don't see that much in the video because, unfortunately, the camera got jammed and so all the footage from that set-up came back unusable. Which is a great shame because it was one of the largest, strangest rooms I've ever been in. I think there was something inherently Kubrick about it from that carpet. There's a touch of *The Shining*, I think. It's like a wonky *Shining*. I guess it was a conference room. It seemed like the carpet on the walls and the carpet on the floor were having a disagreement. Carpets on walls having disagreements with carpets on floors - I think that might be the mantra of the interior design department in the *Tranquility Base Hotel & Casino*."



**On posing for photographs
[and referencing
Abbey Road-era Beatles]**

"I suppose when you're looking at, when it comes to photographing four blokes together, I can't think of that many scenarios that aren't bands that you can draw reference from. I mean, there are a couple of things that we've referenced before - like groups of scientists and things like that. But invariably things like iconic shots of The Beatles kind of rear their head. I suppose you just try not to be the guys leaning over the edge all the time."

On La Frette Studios, La Frette-sur-Seine
"La Frette is where we recorded a lot of the album, and certainly brought it home and brought it all together. I'd never been there before, but it's somewhere we've wanted to go in the past, and nearly did on the last Last Shadow Puppets album. I think it was something as simple as our producer James [Ford] had come out to LA at the start of making this album, and so it was sort of our turn to come over to him [in Europe]. This was somewhere we'd been wanting to go for a bit - Laurence [Bell] from Domino had recommended it. There's this band I really like called Timber Timbre who had just been there, and the guy from that band had written something about the studio which I remember reading, and he had very complimentary things to say. We decided to give it a go and we weren't disappointed - it's a fantastic studio, it's got a great feel and the people that were taking care of us there were really wonderful. I miss it to be honest."



"We didn't get into Paris at all during that trip, most of our time was spent just in that little village [La Frette-sur-Seine]. It's a long time since we've done that on a record, lived in the place where we've recorded and been together every night. It was a fantastic experience."

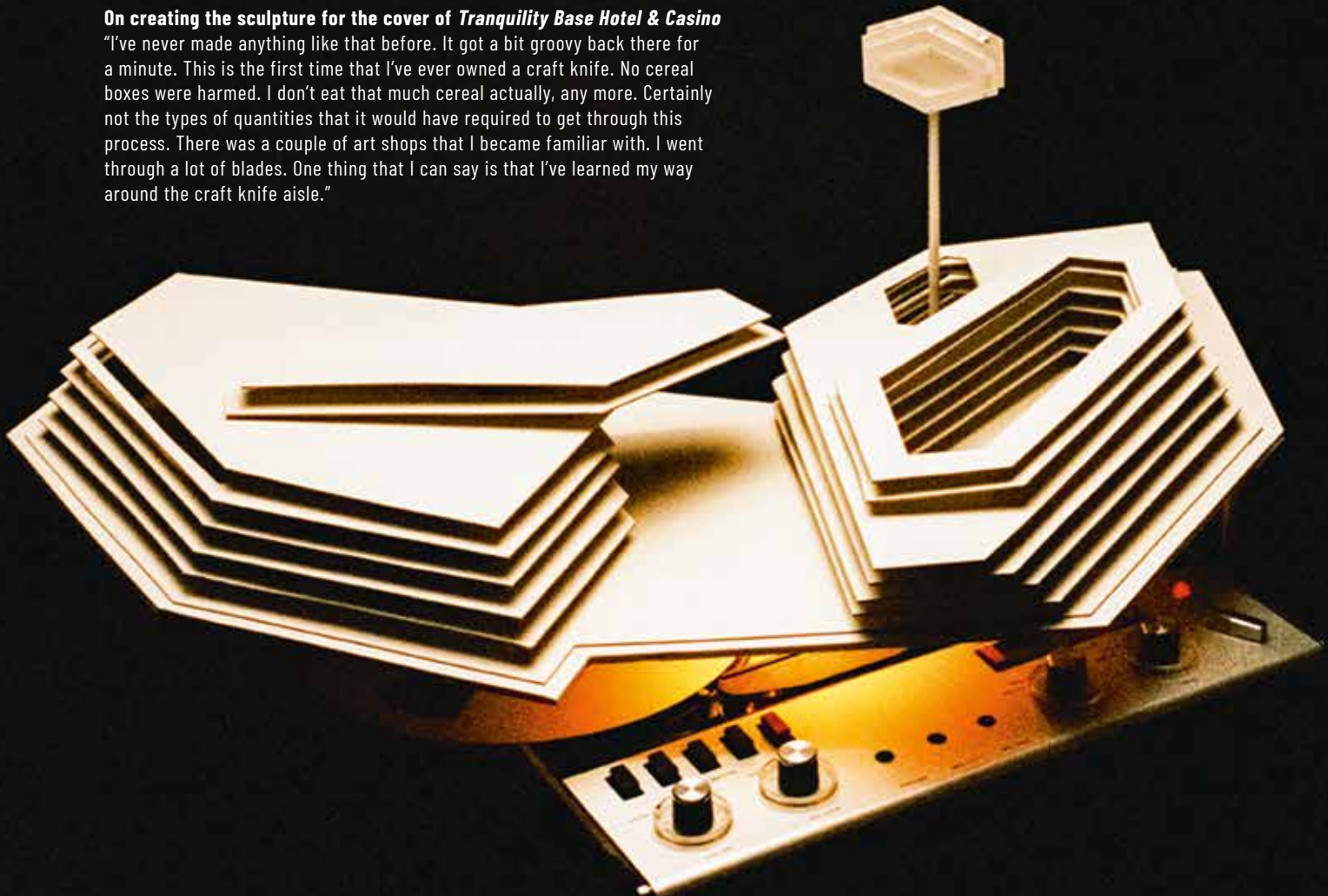


"I've enjoyed talking to you about these things. Photos of myself. The only thing I prefer to having my picture taken is to have to dissect it afterwards. I'm only kidding, I've not felt remotely uncomfortable."



On creating the sculpture for the cover of *Tranquility Base Hotel & Casino*

"I've never made anything like that before. It got a bit groovy back there for a minute. This is the first time that I've ever owned a craft knife. No cereal boxes were harmed. I don't eat that much cereal actually, any more. Certainly not the types of quantities that it would have required to get through this process. There was a couple of art shops that I became familiar with. I went through a lot of blades. One thing that I can say is that I've learned my way around the craft knife aisle."



MUSIC

WHEN JARVIS MET BOWIE

APPEARED IN ISSUE 1188

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'I CAN'T THINK OF A TIME THAT I DIDN'T THINK ABOUT DEATH'

Last week David Bowie died and the world mourned the loss of one of the creative giants of our time. Just 69, he had kept his terminal liver cancer private for 18 months.

In recent years, Bowie rarely gave interviews. But back in 1997 he spoke to *The Big Issue*. The interview marks a unique and extraordinary confluence of talents: Damien Hirst, as our guest editor, decided to chase an interview with Bowie so he commissioned his friend Jarvis Cocker to carry it out. Hirst wanted them to discuss a specific subject – smoking. It led to a remarkably intimate philosophical reflection on the power of addiction, the futility of reaching for another high, and of family and the meaning of life – and death. It reinforces why Bowie will be so missed.

Jarvis Cocker: I asked Damien why he wanted me to talk to you about smoking, and it seemed to be that you'd given up every other vice in your life but you hadn't given up smoking and he wondered why that was.

David Bowie: Oh, I see. Well I think I still do a lot of drugs, you know: caffeine and smoking, and I'm probably addicted to television and certain kinds of newspapers and art. Addiction comes in all sorts of forms but the ones that were physically damaging, not so much to me but to the people around me, they had to go, firstly. Then there's cigarettes. Once Iman and I start having children, I think they will have to go too. Do you really stand by the idea of living for a long time or do you instead want to fill a shorter life with maybe more interesting things? One makes a compromise between the two, actually.

JC: I remember when I was growing up and my mother smoked and she used to say to me: "Go to the corner shop and buy me some cigs."

DB: Yeah, I had exactly the same.

JC: And I used to say: "You know mum, you're killing yourself." I really was against it, so it's quite ironic that I've ended up smoking.

DB: Mine was a house of smokers as well, both parents smoked a considerable number of cigarettes. I think it was Senior Service and then when my father had a better job it became Weights. And I'd steal his. I think it was the rite of passage through to adulthood that appealed to me, that was the thing about it. Are you smoking at the moment, by the way?

JC: No but I've got a packet just in case I feel the urge.

DB: Well, I've got one on so...

JC: Okay, I'll join you then.

DB: When you're a kid it's really a kind of perverse need to try something that's risky because it's frowned

upon by older people. Also because you know it's inherently bad for you.

JC: So, when you wake up in the morning, are you one of these people that reaches straight for the bedside table and lights up or do you try to stave it off for as long as possible?

DB: I'll stave it off until breakfast. At the end of breakfast when I'm having a cup of coffee I'll have a cigarette. So it's from pretty early on in the morning. In a general day I get through about 40 Marlboro Lights, which is a cut-down from what I used to smoke, believe me. When I'm on the road I tend to drop down to about 20.

JC: I was going to ask you that – do they affect your voice?

DB: I think probably that I'd sing much better if I didn't smoke. I'm sure of that actually. I've lost loads of notes from the top register with the years of smoking but then someone suggested that smoking will often help people presume that they could be greater if they didn't smoke. Which I kinda like – "well you know if I didn't smoke, of course I could get those top Cs".

JC: I'll quote some lyrics to you. "Time takes a cigarette, puts it in your mouth" – am I getting this right? – "You pull on your finger and then a cigarette."

DB: That was a sort of plagiarised line from Baudelaire which was something to the effect of life is a cigarette, smoke it in a hurry or savour it.

JC: I've heard Damien say that every time he has a cigarette he thinks about death. Do you go along with that?

DB: I can't think of a time that I didn't think about death. There again, I've been smoking all my life so it's hard to not equate the two together. You know, I'm fairly easygoing about the length of life in a way – it'll sort of happen when it happens. It sounds good anyway. But will Damien still smoke around his child?

JC: Eh, I don't know actually. I'll have to ask.

DB: That's an interesting thing because that's the area that worries me. That's the area where I get a little righteous and moral about it because, over the past at least 10 or 15 years, it's really come home to me what impact one's own vices can have on other people, and that really determines how I mistreat my own body. I try not to smoke around Iman that much but I'm not very good at that.

JC: Have you read *Cigarettes Are Sublime*? I've got a few quotes here: "They are sublime because they involve a confrontation with mortality."

DB: Ah, that's the thinking-of-death-as-you-smoke number.

JC: Mmm, that's it, isn't it? What about this one >



Photo: Corbis

– Oscar Wilde: “A cigarette is the perfect type of the perfect pleasure. It is exquisite and it leaves one unsatisfied, what more can one want? Each cigarette is an absolute failure, never providing the imagined fulfilment.”

DB: But I think you can apply that to nearly any of life’s pleasures. They all leave you unsatisfied because you try to reach that high every time. You always have to go back.

JC: You have to keep trying.

DB: You have to keep trying. You keep going for it. Not just to get the high but you’re hoping in desperation that one day the high that you do achieve will stay with you. But of course it never does, so in its own way it’s an avenue to insanity. It produces a rat syndrome, you know, where you just go round and round and round. Circularity.

JC: No one can ever accept the fact that life consists of a series of highlights and you can never really keep those highlights going.

DB: It’s plate-spinning.

JC: That’s the thing that makes them a pleasure.

DB: It’s wise not to get too euphoric or too melancholic. A balance in-between for me has always given me a much wider and easier passage through life. I find it’s such a disillusionment to get incredibly excited and happy about things, and that will not maintain. Also it’s quite psychotic to become like that. I mean it’s really depressed schizophrenia, when you go from those incredible heights to lows. I’ve done all of those and it really serves one badly.

JC: It’s like the Prozac argument, that the drug will level people out so they will never feel things very extremely at all.

DB: Right but the other side of that is that it also reduces your ability to have emotional contact. People will not really pay quite such close attention to what their children are going through or their wives or husbands or whatever. They exist in a kind of Stepford Wife world, so there’s two sides. There’s two sides to everything, though, Jarvis. Don’t you feel that honestly in your system?

JC: Yeah.

DB: Are we giving Damien what he wants?

JC: Oh God, I don’t know, and I don’t know what he wants. In America, there are loads of no-smoking buildings and no-smoking bars and you often stand shivering outside on the streets in the middle of winter.

DB: Well yes – we think of ourselves as sometimes approaching a nanny state but I think it’s far more prevalent in the States. It’s been part of their history since prohibition onwards – the idea of telling people what they should be doing. Their assumption is that they know best. Within a rational, straightforward way they’re probably right but I think you must have the choice to screw yourself. On the other hand, I do appreciate it is quite nice sometimes to have a meal without people smoking around you.

JC: It seems to be a kind of contentious point about secondary smoking or passive smoking.

DB: Yeah, and I do understand, but there again have you ever tried to conduct a relationship on cocaine?

I mean, what you do to the person is absolutely foul. It really is beyond tolerance, it’s dreadful. So few drugs don’t have an effect on the other person. Coffee so far seems to be okay.

JC: You can still keep a relationship together then?

DB: I think you can get a bit irritable if you’ve had too much but I think the sort of by-product of it isn’t ruined lives. I’ve not heard of many couples that were split apart by one’s addiction to coffee.



One of Bowie’s final photos, released to coincide with his album *Blackstar*

JC: It probably will happen if cigarettes get ground out of the way. So, my final question is: do you light your cigarettes with matches or a lighter?

DB: Wow. I used to light them with matches because it had a more theatrical effect, I think. But as my awareness that the cigarette doesn’t represent any particular attitude any more, it doesn’t have the potency of a symbol it used to have. I saw it once as a prop on stage, now I smoke on stage just because I need one. So now I’m quite happy with a Bic, which is pretty sort of fundamental. But I was aware of ritual and

routine and theatricality with a cigarette when I was younger. I knew exactly what I was doing around the stage, and the cigarette became symbolic of a certain kind of removed identity, you know – that I don’t have to be singing these songs, I’m just doing you a favour. I think the symbolic cigarette has dropped way behind now. It’s just another bloody thing that I do.

JC: Well, you know, don’t worry about it.

DB: No, I must say I don’t. I’m not losing sleep.

JC: Right, well, that’s it.

DB: Well it’s really nice to talk with you, Jarvis.

JC: You know it’s for this Big Issue thing, don’t you?

DB: Yeah.

JC: Thank you very much.

DB: Ta-ra.

To read Malcolm Jack’s review of David Bowie’s new album *Blackstar* turn to page p37

WHEN JARVIS MET BOWIE

HOW THE FORMER PULP FRONTMAN REMEMBERS IT...



I was quite nervous about the interview. I’d met him before very briefly but not to talk to. I presented an award to him and Brian Eno for his work on what they now call the *Berlin Trilogy*. I said “congratulations” and that’s as far as the conversation went. The idea of talking about smoking came from Damien Hirst. I think it was a good thing because where do you start with someone whose work you admire a lot?

If you gush and say how much you admire them, they’re just going to get defensive. As we’ve seen, there’s been an outpouring of public emotion about his death. A lot of people in society today will milk an emotional situation for what it’s worth. But he did the opposite. He kept it secret and he tried to channel what he was going through into his creative work. That’s something we should learn from.

I was always a bit of a lightweight when it came to smoking. If I got to 10 a day I’d make myself really ill, so I knocked it on the head about six years ago.

Photo: Jimmy King

MUSIC

THURSTON MOORE

APPEARED IN ISSUE 1253

24 April 2017



LETTER TO MY YOUNGER SELF



Thurston Moore

Sonic Youth legend, budding music journalist

I was 16 when I started receiving signals from the margins, music and literature that was coming from otherworldly places and really resonated with me. I was a magazine fiend, stacking up rock'n'roll magazines like *Creem*, *Hit Parader* and *Rolling Stone*. The writers were pretty hip, people like Lester Bangs, Richard Meltzer, Patti Smith, Lenny Kaye. I would read these articles and remember their names – Lester Bangs sounded as exciting to me as Iggy Pop. I think I just realised their world was more imaginative, more adventurous and magical. And I liked that. I went running towards it.

I think when I first saw the first *New York Dolls* album it was in a drugstore in Bethel, Connecticut, the little town I was living in. I was very aware all this action was happening very close by in New York,

about an hour and a half away. And I knew I had to get there. I was a kind of happy go lucky nerd in school. I was not a sports hero and girls didn't give me much of a look. I had this one friend, the only gay high school kid, and he saw that I was into this otherworldly stuff and he said to me: "Hey man, let's go and see Patti Smith at the Playhouse in Westport." So we skipped school and drove over there and that was life-changing.

It wasn't like I came from a weird family who drove me into these outward zones. We were a middle-class average family. But we had books about art and literature; my father was a teacher. He taught philosophy and music – classical piano. So there was music in the house. I didn't realise we were unusual until I went to other kids' houses and I was like, where are all the books? I realised there was something a bit heavier going on in our house. A thread of culture. Maybe that was the guide for me.

My father died when I was 18. I was very close to him so that was very jarring. He would come to me in my dreams and I would wake up knowing he was there. I think his death did create an instruction for me to go



"My father died when I was 18. He'd come to me in my dreams and I'd wake up knowing he was there"

off and establish myself. My mom came to see us the first time Sonic Youth played a proper gig at CBGB and there was a bit of a buzz around us. Afterwards she was joyous but then she started crying and I asked her what was wrong. She said: "I just wish your father could have seen that. He would have loved it." That was really heartbreaking. She turns 90 this year and she still comes to see me play. She's pretty hardcore.

I did briefly go to college and I wrote some music reviews there. The first was of Rick Seeger, nephew of Pete. He sat playing his folk music in those wooden shoes from Holland. So I wrote an entire piece about his shoes, wondering what it was like being chased down the street wearing them, that kind of thing. A week later we got a letter from Rick Seeger saying, how dare you send a completely unprofessional kid to my concert. And I was like, wow, I actually had an effect with my writing! I hadn't done it to hurt him, it didn't occur to me he would read it. So next I wrote about a John Cale gig at CBGB and when it came out the editor had 'fixed' my misspelling of John Cale's name and changed it to John Cage. I was absolutely infuriated. Then the editor suggested I move from music to sports. That's when I decided to leave college.

I migrated to New York when I was 19 and found a very, very cheap place to live. I was working in an upscale furnishing store and I started playing guitar with a girl who worked there. I decided to go completely free and wild on the guitar and she looked at me like I was insane and said: "I think you should meet a friend of mine – she actually likes this kind of thing. And she has a bass guitar." And that was Kim [Gordon, bass player and Moore's wife for the next 27 years]. That was the beginning of Sonic Youth.

I'd love to go back and say to my teenage self,



Clockwise from top left: Thurston Moore with Kim Gordon and their daughter Coco in 2005; Sonic Youth at CBGB in 1981; alongside current partner Eva Prinz

you know all those records that mean so much to you? David Bowie, Iggy and the Stooges, Patti Smith, Can, that weird Sparks record? You're going to interact with all of those musicians one day. I know that's hard to believe. It will sound like science fiction to you. But it's true. It first happened in the late '80s, when Iggy Pop came onstage to do this very savage version of I Wanna Be Your Dog with us. It was so unbelievably great that when I went home that night I didn't sleep at all. I spent all night just staring into the void thinking, I cannot believe I just shared the stage with someone who helped define my future 10 years ago.

Is there anything I would do differently? That's a little tricky. Um... I would say to my younger self, in your 30s and 40s be more aware of your ego. And check yourself at the door. And try to refute any tendencies of narcissism. You can become very me-centric. And when it comes to your family – call your mother every day. I still have to work on that. When I call my mother sometimes she says, oh my God, look who's still alive. Look what the wind blew in. She used to tell me, one day you'll grow up and have a child, and one day that child will leave home and that child is not going to call you and you're going to know exactly how I feel. And you know what, she's exactly right.

I've been able to situate my life with the woman I am in love with and have lived with for the last few years [Moore separated from Kim Gordon in 2011, having begun a relationship with book editor Eva Prinz]. And a lot of people have said, oh he's in this place where there's a new light coming out of him. Which is really nice to hear. But that's really personal. Life has a propensity to change radically when you get to your 50s. I accept that. I've tried to be as responsible as I can. And I have complete trust in the affairs of my heart so I'm very happy.

I've lived in two cities in my life: New York and now London. But in these times of stricter borders I feel more and more like I want to be a citizen of the world, I want to go wherever I want without anyone trying to tell me I can't live there. I want to get away from nationalist ideas of place and identity. I think there's honour in being in opposition to power. Power is for the weak-minded. I'm ready to get all my noise-rock friends to surround Trump Towers, switch on our amplifiers and play at the loudest volume until it crumbles to the ground like the fake dust it is.

IN 1974 THE YEAR THURSTON MOORE TURNS 16...

US President Richard Nixon announces his resignation after the Watergate scandal / In New York, the Ramones play their first concert

Thurston Moore's album *Rock n Roll Consciousness* is out April 28. He tours the UK in June; thurstonmoore.com
Words: Jane Graham @Janeannie

MUSIC

THE SPECIALS

APPEARED IN ISSUE 1343
28 January 2019



THE NATION'S IN TURMOIL AGAIN. TIME FOR THE SPECIALS TO RETURN

Nearly 40 years ago, as Margaret Thatcher's policies bit, *The Specials* captured the mood and anger of a fracturing nation. Into an even more chaotic, splintering period they return with new material for the first time since. Back to Ghost Town, and back to the future. Words: Adrian Lobb

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The Specials, photographed for *The Big Issue* on the banks of the Thames and around London, on January 17 by Mathew Parri Thomas

"The tide is a bit further in," says Terry Hall.

Hall, Lynval Golding and Horace Panter, aka The Specials, are throwing rocks into the Thames at St Katharine Docks. It is almost 38 years since they were last on this tidal mudbank together, at 5am, rounding off a riotous night shoot for the video to accompany perhaps their finest achievement as a band.

Ghost Town was so much more than a hit record. It was a visceral, uncompromising portrait of how it felt to be young in Thatcher's Britain. "No jobs to be found in this country." "Government leaving the youth on the shelf." "All the clubs have been closed down." "The people getting angry." The song depicted a country on the edge of violent unrest.

The recording, release and success of Ghost Town took place against a backdrop of UK rioting, including Toxteth in Liverpool, Handsworth in Birmingham, Brixton in London and Moss Side in Manchester. The video showed the band careering through Britain's deserted financial heartlands in the City of London, and if the 1962 Vauxhall Cresta driven by Panter seemed out of control, so was the country.

"Everybody thinks that Ghost Town was written about their city," says the bass player. "If you are from Coventry, you assume it was about Coventry. Actually, it applied to the majority of the country. We were on tour in 1980 and could see this urban decay was happening.

"To me the scariest thing ever was to sit in my little first-floor flat in Coventry and watch riots on the television and have this song, which was Number One in the charts, playing in the background. It was very, very spooky. That is my memory of Ghost Town."

Before we head on to the beach to recreate an iconic scene, Golding switches footwear—from smart, shiny new brogues to an almost-as-smart slip-on loafer, to protect the former pair from the mud. He's taking no chances. The tide is high, and he and Panter are holding on to each other to avoid taking a tumble on the stones.

In the background, as the light fades, Tower Bridge remains unaltered. But the derelict chocolate biscuit factory on the South Bank from 1981

is now the expensive flats of Butlers Wharf. And The Shard, which dominates the skyline behind the bridge these days, is a symbol of excess with the £50m apartments at its summit unsold years after construction was completed.

"I get upset by the scale of homelessness. That is why I am sitting here today," says Hall. "And I just can't put two and two together when I see so much money going into buildings that are so unused. And they are painfully unused."

The singer hurls a couple of large rocks into the water with all the enthusiasm of a surly teenager before standing back to watch his bandmates. "I'm sure I was only watching in the Ghost Town video," he says, smirking, as though he's swerved a PE lesson.

These times feel made for The Specials. The band whose songs of defiance, of hope, of anger, of youth, from the perspective of a working-class, multi-racial band from de-industrialising Coventry became bigger than they, or anyone else expected.

Their debut single, Gangsters, was the first full release on the 2-Tone label set up by original keyboard player and main songwriter Jerry Dammers. It reached Number Six in 1979. A run of singles—A Message To You Rudy, Too Much Too Young, Rat Race—followed, capturing the mood of large parts of the country like no other group. No band had looked or sounded like this before—turning rage into poetry, blending genres, influences and styles, projecting a progressive, anti-racist message through their music and their sheer existence, and making it all seem so urgent, so vital.

Yet after Ghost Town topped the chart in 1981, Hall and Golding, along with Neville Staple, left to form Fun Boy Three—with Hall, aged just 22, finding the balance between the band's political message and pop star status hard to strike. Too much too young?

"It felt very weird, for me. I kept it to myself, but when we picked up a gold disc for Ghost Town, I felt really bad about it," he says now. "We were being rewarded with a gold disc and it felt uncomfortable."

"It was at that point, personally, when I felt this had got to change. It wasn't making any sense to me. You are being told to celebrate this Number-One record that is about what is happening, the mess that we are in, and I felt very uncomfortable. I felt you needed to be one or the other, you needed to be The Dooleys or you needed to be Gang of Four. We were right in the middle then. I didn't feel comfortable."

The Specials have recorded and toured in various guises since, with Golding playing on The Special AKA's Free Nelson Mandela (written by Dammers) in 1984. But the current line-up, which returned to performing live in 2008, is the first to include Hall since 1981—and new album *Encore* is their first release under their original name since Ghost Town. It is, therefore, a massive deal.

In the intervening years, Panter taught art in Coventry and has become an in-demand artist, while continuing to make music. Golding played in groups including Gigantor and Pama International after Fun Boy Three disbanded with two albums to their name in 1983. Drummer John Bradbury died in 2015, just as the ideas for new songs were starting to flow. Hall, meanwhile, has continued to write and record, releasing two solo LPs and collaborating with everyone from Gorillaz to Lily Allen, Eurythmics' Dave Stewart and Mushtaq of Fun-Da-Mental.

"We have always got a lot to say," says Hall, when I suggest 2019 is the perfect time for The Specials to unveil their biggest new release in decades.

"You could tie our music in with any event of any year we release it... maybe apart from the Winter Olympics. We wouldn't be so relevant there. But yeah, it just so happens that the country is in turmoil again. Huge turmoil. Bigger than you would want to imagine."

"I find myself in awe of the mess, nightly listening to politicians giving their opinion and thinking, I don't necessarily trust any of you, really. It is pretty sad. I grew up aligned to a party, the Labour Party, quite strongly. Until Tony Blair made Noel Gallagher prime minister I knew exactly where I stood."

Panter, the only member of the band still based in Coventry, agrees. "Injustice is timeless, unfortunately," he says. "You can write songs with the same subject matter, I'm afraid, now in 2019 as you could in 1979."

"Mrs Thatcher was voted in as prime minister on 4 May 1979. I remember we played at Dingwalls the night before."

"Playing songs like It Doesn't Make It Alright is as important to me now as it was back then. I still play with the same intensity, for the same reasons I did it in the first place."

Golding takes up the idea: "It is really strange thinking back. We are going through something very similar with another female Conservative prime minister. Although it is nothing to do with her being female."

"Maggie inspired us to write songs. And with this new song, Vote For Me, we are telling them that we wouldn't vote for them. None of them. Because the people who have been elected to represent us now are doing a very, very, very bad job. They are not representing us, the people."

They do this a lot, The Specials. Listen to each other quietly, respectfully, then join in, reinforcing the message, backing up their bandmates.

The new LP takes in a range of styles—from the disco of opening track Black Skin Blue Eyed Boys—to classic ska on Vote For Me, via Hall's depiction of his bipolar on The Life And Times (Of A Man Called Depression) and Golding's poetic, autobiographical spoken-word on BLM (aka Black Lives Matter).

"This record is about conversation. Let's have a talk. Good dancing music, but saying to people, let's have a little discussion instead of shouting," says the guitarist. "I am all for protesting, but this comes on like Martin Luther King—non-violent protest. That is how we deliver those songs."

"BLM is from my father. He was invited to England to come and rebuild



'INJUSTICE IS TIMELESS. YOU CAN WRITE SONGS WITH THE SAME SUBJECT MATTER NOW AS YOU COULD IN 1979'
HORACE PANTER



Not so changed days: Golding, Panter and Hall now and, in 1981



Photography: Matthew Parri Thomas

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OF OUR EXCLUSIVE SHOOT



Saffiyah Khan faces down the EDL in a Specials shirt

Photography: Mathew Parri Thomas / Joe Giddens/PA Archive/PA Images

But the image of Khan standing up to bigotry, armed only with a denim jacket, a Specials T-shirt, a smile and a huge amount of courage made a big statement. And it moved Hall.

"I thought it was beautiful, really," he says. "What better reaction can you give someone than a smile? It just deflates everything. Sometimes saying nothing is better than shouting. What Saffiyah did to the EDL made them look so stupid and it really worked. There was real power in her silence.

"We tracked her down because it is a pretty iconic photo. Then we invited her to a gig in Birmingham, met her, and she is really great. So when we started recording the album, one of the ideas was to think about who else could be involved and her name came up."

Did she feel the fear about taking the microphone for the first time, reading words she had written as a response to Prince Buster's super-sexist Ten Commandments of Man? Not for long.

"She was very nervous because she had never done it before. But afterwards, it was like watching Bonnie Langford or Shirley Temple," grins Hall. "She wants to do more. It was so nice. Hopefully she will be performing with us on tour."

According to Hall, The Specials are still able to chart modern Britain because as people they have not changed. Sure, Golding now lives in Seattle and Hall takes his morning coffee in Islington.

"But we still live our lives the way we always have done," he says, "Some people in bands turn into..."

"Twerps?" suggests Panter, before Hall talks about his fanatical following of Manchester United, over decades, with the same friends and now with two generations of his children. There's a joy at Old Trafford now, he says, in contrast to the "so grim" Mourinho era. And at Specials gigs now, the band find joy in the generations of fans mixing.

"Saffiyah was a 19-year-old girl wearing our T-shirt. You think, wow, we have said something," says Golding. "I have to thank her father for introducing her to our records. We now get adults saying their parents turned them on to our music. We never planned that 40 years later this would happen. I am so humbled. It is another generation now. And that is really nice.

"Ghost Town sums up that period in 1981. What Terry wrote on Vote For Me is exactly spot on about now. Both songs sum it up, with 37 years in between."

Austerity, cuts to youth services, pressure on school budgets, pubs and clubs closing, homelessness rising – and here are The Specials, just when we need them most.

"We realised how great it would be to make a record on our 40th anniversary," says Hall "Like Horace was saying, it still feels like a real privilege to wake up and think you can look after your family and still do what you do. It is not to be sniffed at, that, really.

"And we have still got a voice. People still come to see us. It is whether you class yourself as relevant. And I still think we are relevant"

The Specials are so much more than relevant. In times like these, they might just be essential.

Encore is out on UMC / Island Records on February 1.

The Specials are on tour from April. @adey70

BEHIND-THE-SCENES SPECIALS VIDEO

– EXCLUSIVE

We filmed The Specials when they revisited the landmarks of the Ghost Town video. To watch, follow this 5-step guide to augmented reality and scan this page



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MUSIC

JOHNNY MARR AND BLONDIE

APPEARED IN ISSUE 1508
11 April 2022



WHEN JOHNNY MET BLONDIE

Johnny Marr is having a good year. His Billie Eilish collaboration just won an Oscar, and he's about to play alongside his old pals Blondie on their upcoming tour. So what do megastar music legends talk about when they get together? Sam Delaney listens in

● Johnny Marr used to play cover versions of Blondie singles *Denis* and *Hanging On The Telephone* (both, ironically, covers themselves) in his first teenage band. When he met his wife at a house party in Manchester, aged 15, he remembers their classic 1978 album *Parallel Lines* being on the stereo. His love of the New York post-punk legends has been a constant throughout his life. So how does it feel that he now writes songs for them (he contributed *My Monster* to their 2017 album *Pollinator* and has written another, *Spectrolite*, which will appear on their next record) and is about to

join them as special guest on their UK tour. "It's magical," he says "I've always shared a musical sensibility with them. Plus they're great people to be around. They're the only band that nobody doesn't like."

Marr is talking to me via Zoom from his rehearsal studio on the outskirts of Manchester. Also on the call are Blondie's songwriter-in-chief Chris Stein (from downtown New York) and – from her charmingly appointed living room in New Jersey – Debbie Harry. I'm in my garden shed in South-West London. Ordinarily, speaking with either Marr or Stein

– two of the greatest rock musicians of the past 50 years – would feel like a privilege in itself. But there's something about being on a call from your shed with Debbie Harry that really monopolises your focus. You can't help but continually think to yourself, "I'm on a call with Debbie Harry."

In any case, it doesn't matter much because this is the first time my three interviewees – now old friends and colleagues – have seen each other in a while. Between war in Ukraine, the Will Smith/Chris Rock clash at the Oscars and their forthcoming tour, they're not short of things to talk about. ▶

JOHNNY: Hi Debbie. Hi Chris. I'm looking forward to seeing you on the tour.

CHRIS: Yeah well, listen, I'm not coming.

JOHNNY: What?!

DEBBIE: You're a dirty rat! Haha.

CHRIS: Look, I was diagnosed with an irregular heartbeat, you know? So I'm OK. But the medications I take are kinda fatiguing. So you know, my stamina isn't what it used to be. I'm just gonna just get a replacement for me and the band should do OK. But I hope not to disappoint everybody. And especially you.

JOHNNY: I understand. That's a shame but we'll find another excuse to hang out soon. Thanks for the invitation to tour with you guys anyway. I should have said that straight away. It was a real thrill to be asked. Took me about three seconds to think about.

DEBBIE: Three seconds? Well, that's too long. But look, it couldn't be better. We love you. We love the way that you write and the way that you think. It's going to be a great show we do together. The only drawback for me is that Chris is not going to join the party. But we'll muck on without him.

THE BIG ISSUE: How do you approach touring these days? Johnny, I know you're really into sober, healthy living.

JOHNNY: Yeah, I quit drink years ago, but not because I had any big moment of revelation. It was like everything I do – I just saw it as a progressive move. To me, I thought it made me a better musician. And more interesting. It gave me more time and more energy. I was bored with drinking. I didn't want to be that guy, you know, getting into my 40s still doing all that stuff. It's a bit of a cliché.

It actually happened at a good time in my life. And it made me go where I needed to go as a musician – my lyrics got better, my playing got more intense and my shows got better. I always say if I thought partying would make me a better songwriter, I'd be doing it. I don't have any kind of puritanical thing about it, it's just what I've got going works for me, especially on the road. I think that as an older musician you need all the energy you can get.

DEBBIE: Well I'm curious about how I will respond to being back out on the road since I haven't done it for a couple of years. But I agree – I've had to change my behaviour over the years, and behaviour is very hard

In the UK now there's a lack of accountability – the amount of times our government has been busted for personal mistakes and breaking the law... it's a shit show because there's no opposition

JOHNNY MARR



to change. So bravo to both of us for that. On tour these days I do what the women on the front during the French Revolution would do. I sit there knitting and rocking back and forth. That's what I do. I will be bringing my knitting needles with me.

CHRIS: Well, I've been writing my memoir, and I realised that I had so much to write about addiction because I was taking drugs in one shape or form for my whole career. And there are so many war stories like: "Oh, hey, remember that time we scored from that guy who sold us bleach and we shot that up and went to hospital? It was great!" Getting over that stuff, it's a process. But I haven't really done anything for 20 years. You know, I was never a drinker. I was just always an addict.

JOHNNY: Yeah, I'm such a lightweight now. Even if I smoked some weed now I'd be, like, crying under the sofa. But I think my sensibilities from being a teenager have stayed the same. And my kind of values have stayed the same. That became even more obvious to me with the political scene with Brexit and with Trump and all of this. I almost reverted back to the 15-year-old unreasonable pothead I used to be. I just went back to thinking that half the world were twats and the other half were OK.

CHRIS: I used to think that the masses were more intelligent than the individual. That the group somehow was smarter than the sum? But now I'm like you, I've gone back to thinking everyone is an idiot.

DEBBIE: Oh grow up Chris! Hahaha. We're going backwards!

CHRIS: I just watched [Netflix documentary series] *The Andy Warhol*

Diaries. All throughout the thing, Debbie is presented as a big superstar, you know, and she's up there with Liz Taylor and all these people. But when all that shit was going on with us, we never felt like that ever. We were always like, "Oh, yeah, we're gonna be a cult band, you know?" It's never presented that way now. It's presented as if we were considered global superstars at the time. In retrospect, it's just weird to me, because it wasn't part of our experience that Debbie was a big superstar icon. Yeah, OK, now she is one – but we have to wait this fucking long before it's presented back to us like that.

DEBBIE: Yeah, I don't even feel that way today, to be honest. I just feel like it's a privilege to be an artist. But I do have the kind of neurotic off-centre sensibility which keeps me away from feeling like a real superstar and also, in a way, has saved me from some big mistakes in my life. Although I have made plenty of those too.

THE BIG ISSUE: Congratulations on winning an Oscar this week Johnny [Marr played guitar on the Academy Award-winning Bond theme *No Time To Die*, sung by Billie Eilish and written by Eilish and Finneas O'Connell].

JOHNNY: God, I thought none of you were ever gonna mention that!

THE BIG ISSUE: Well Chris and Debbie didn't so I thought I ought to.

DEBBIE: Well, after the big slapping scene [the Will Smith/Chris Rock incident] who can remember anything? But well done Johnny, it was worthwhile and you definitely earned it.

JOHNNY: Well, my bit was a really easy bit. Come on. I mean, I just play guitar on this great song, but thank you.

THE BIG ISSUE: Have you ever seen anything like that at an awards show before?

CHRIS: Well, we were involved in a good one at our Rock & Roll Hall Of Fame induction [in 2006]. Frankie [Infante, former Blondie guitarist] was up on stage with us and decided that it was a good moment to address grievances in front of the audience, about not being asked to play with us that night. We had the new version of Blondie at that point [Infante had left the band and was in legal dispute with them over royalties]. Everyone was expecting the Sex Pistols to overshadow everything that night because they were being inducted too. But all they did was not bother to show up

and send a letter telling everyone to stick the award up their asses or whatever. But then we had somewhat of an on-stage altercation which was what the media latched onto the next day.

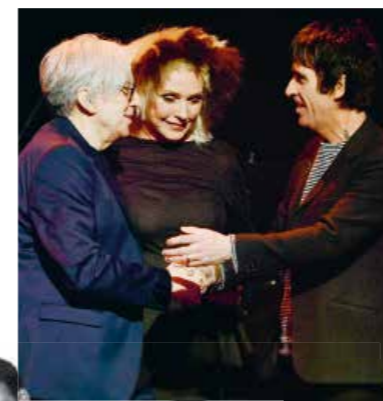
DEBBIE: We were sort of thinking of having a food fight but everyone was quite nicely dressed that night, so that idea got voted down in the end.

JOHNNY: What comes to mind actually was at an awards ceremony in London [the *GQ* Man of the Year awards in 2006], and fairly early into the proceedings, Rod Stewart just stood up and demanded that Russell Brand apologise for being indiscreet in the media about his daughter. I think they'd had a relationship and he'd been joking about it publicly. People weren't even drunk yet. He really took Russell Brand to task. And you know what? I have to say, I was really impressed with Rod Stewart for that, because it was probably awkward for him. And it was beyond celebrity. It was beyond decorum. He knew that he was going to have to deal with a bunch of hassle for it afterwards. But it was about his daughter's honour. So he just bust straight through everything and gave him a dressing down in front of everyone. I might be making too much of it here. But I do remember it very well. It was a real human moment. And it was very noble.

CHRIS: Anyway, Chris Rock's ticket sales have surged after the slap, so that's good for him.

THE BIG ISSUE: Maybe it was a set up?

DEBBIE: I don't think so. I have never seen Chris Rock's face reflect those kind of feelings. It was a revelation, you know? To see this person out of



PARALLEL LIVES

Blondie were formed by then-couple Debbie Harry and Chris Stein in New York in 1974. They were regular performers at iconic punk venue CBGB and by 1979, when *Heart of Glass* was topping charts everywhere, could justifiably claim to be the biggest band in the world, with Harry one of the most recognisable faces. Their run of hits (including *Sunday Girl*, *Atomic and Rapture* as well as countless others) was astonishing. But in 1982 the band called it a day, and Harry spent years nursing Stein back to health from a rare autoimmune condition. The pair eventually split romantically, but came back as Blondie with a refreshed line-up in 1997, scoring a sixth UK Number One single with *Maria* in 1999, and have been together ever since. They were inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall Of Fame in 2006.

Johnny Marr found fame as the guitarist and co-songwriter in The Smiths, but was only 23 when they split at the height of their success in 1987. Since then he's been in Electronic with New Order's Bernard Sumner, and has also served time in a variety of bands including Talking Heads, Pretenders, The The, Modest Mouse and The Cribs. He has worked with Hans Zimmer on a number of heavyweight movie soundtracks, most notably *Inception*, *The Amazing Spider Man 2* and *No Time To Die*. He started his own successful solo career in 2013.

his character – for a moment he was really caught. It was clearly a surprise.

JOHNNY: I'm glad something happened at the Oscars for once. I don't know whether you've ever been. It's boring.

DEBBIE: I went to an Oscars party once and Arnold Schwarzenegger walked up to me and said that I looked very healthy.

JOHNNY: I hope you said, "Well so do you mate."

DEBBIE: I said, "Thank you. I work out, Arnold. Can't you tell?"

CHRIS: Arnold should be president. As much as I think most people in California thought he was a terrible governor, I still think he should be president. But unfortunately, he's a foreigner. So...

DEBBIE: Well, he has a terrific amount of world experience. And I mean, he doesn't really have motivations to make money from political deals, I believe. So I think that that's an important quality.

THE BIG ISSUE: Do you think we'd be safer if all politicians were independently wealthy?

DEBBIE: Perhaps.

CHRIS: Yeah, but then it's all about the power. And that's what's going on with Putin. He thinks he's the Tsar.

JOHNNY: Yeah, yeah. And the scary thing with people like him is they really want to go down in history as well. Weirdly, as crazily powerful as he is, I kind of think there's got to be something very, very needy, about someone like that, you know?

THE BIG ISSUE: There's been a lot of anger in the UK about our response to the refugee crisis.

CHRIS: You guys are notorious for that shit. It's all those fucking Tories you've got, it's rough.

JOHNNY: It's become that way over the past 15 or 20 years. My parents came over from Ireland in the Sixties and always stressed to me the idea that this country was open-armed to immigrants. And I've tried to pass that idea on to my own kids as something to be proud of. But it's no longer the case.

This government idea that you can sponsor a family from Ukraine to come and live in your home? It's so

We were always gonna be a cult band. Now it's presented as if we were global superstars at the time. It's weird to me, because it wasn't part of our experience that Debbie was a big superstar icon

CHRIS STEIN

bare-faced. They're essentially saying "If you care so much about these refugees then you take them in yourself!" That's not the way it should be. It should be that the country as a whole is taking action to help. But they are washing their hands of responsibility by telling us to do it ourselves.

In the UK now, there's a lack of accountability – the amount of times that our government has been busted for personal mistakes and breaking the law... it's a shit show, because there's no opposition and there is no accountability.

THE BIG ISSUE: Debbie, how did you feel about the Trump years?

DEBBIE: I thought it was poisonous, really. An idea that children were taken from their families and sent to unknown destinations. It was just destruction for the sake of destruction, and nothing to do with humanity or anything smart. It was just plain old prejudice at its highest level.

THE BIG ISSUE: Did you ever meet Trump?

DEBBIE: I did. I used to see Penn Jillette from Penn and Teller and we've remained friends. He was on [The US version of *The Apprentice*] doing a task where they had to invent a new flavour of ice cream and invite people along to try it. He invited me along and introduced me to Trump, who just said "Hello" and walked right off. It was so brief, I was surprised. I guess maybe I wasn't tall enough for him.

Johnny Marr is the special guest on Blondie's *Against The Odds* UK arena tour, starting at Glasgow's SSE Hydro on April 22. Marr's new album *Fever Dreams Pts 1-4* is out now. @DelaneyMan

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