



# KAISER CHIEFS

above the

# FRAY

BY NEVIN MARTELL + PHOTO BY ELLIS PARRINDER

Who doesn't love a good pop song built for singing at the top of the lungs? Even better—one with a wordless refrain? The ecstatically punked-up “Woo-hoo” in Blur’s “Song 2” and the irresistible stream of ebullient “Oh la la las” at the end of Pulp’s “Common People” are unforgettable in that, well, there’s nothing much to remember. But since Britpop’s fizz went flat, there hadn’t been a U.K. band bold enough (or sufficiently sales-savvy) to carry forth the torch of the wonderfully nonsensical vocal hook...until the Kaiser Chiefs. The band’s über-catchy 2004 debut, *Employment*, featured more than its fair share of “Na na na na naas,” “Ohhhhhhs” and “La la las,” and the entire thing stuck to our membranes with the tenacity of Super Glue.

It’s been a couple of years now and singer Ricky Wilson—along with his mates: guitarist Andrew White, bassist Simon Rix, keyboardist Nick Baines, drummer Nick Hodgson—has been around the world a few times, sold several million records and even survived a hit and run accident. From this spiraling shitstorm of travel, success and broken

#### What kept the fire in your belly burning this time around?

Our first record was fueled by everyone thinking that we’d never do anything. Everyone thought we were too old, that we’d had our chance and it would never happen, and we proved them wrong. This record is fueled by the fact that everyone expected us to fuck up, to just fade away and be a one-hit wonder. We’re not going to piss off just because you think we don’t have it in us.

#### The first album was all about the British experience. Was that intentional?

We’d never been anywhere else. We’d seen movies and watched TV and read books about the rest of the world, but we’d never been there. Now when we go to America, we know that people have preconceptions about us, like we have tea with the Queen all the time. If anyone’s been over here, they’d know it’s actually a pretty boring place to live, like pretty much everywhere in the world. People carry these preconceptions about exotic places, like, “I’m going to zip through Tokyo on my hoverboard and watch TV on my watch!” But when you get there, you can’t find anything to eat and you don’t know what’s going on. The only place that lived up to its preconception is New York, but it’s different, because it’s the world in a city.

#### So is this record more globally informed?

We’ve had our eyes widened a little. I’m not saying that we know everything, but we’ve realized that not everything in life is about getting a record deal. That’s all I cared about when we were writing our first record. I didn’t want to get a proper job; I wanted that to be my employment. But, in fact, getting a record deal is the first of your worries.

You’ve moved away from the “Na na

#### nas” and “Woo woo woos.” Why?

When you’re a support act, you’ve got to grab people’s attention. People thought they knew our songs because they were all just shouting. Starting out, getting the foot in the door...you’ll do anything. I saw an old picture of us and we look like clowns. We had weird eye makeup on and were wearing stripey blazers. We were 28-year-old men! And you wonder, “God, what were we doing?” But it worked. Underneath all that rubbish is music, which is the most important thing.

#### Which new song demonstrates the biggest burst of maturity for the band?

Growing up means getting boring. We don’t want to grow up; we just want to get better. The song I like the most at the moment is “My Kinda Guy.” It sounds like something from a fucked up musical.

#### The subject of that song seems a right old bastard. Why glorify such a boor?

It’s about Ryan in the Cribs. When we were belting out the chorus in the rehearsal room, it sounded like them so much that it became about him. But whenever we go anywhere, people always go off about how nice we are. I kind of want to be the horrible rock star. Now we can call the shots a bit more, so I’m going to start throwing my weight around. [Adopts pompous rock star tone] I want my drink chilled and I want it now!

#### Who is Ruby?

She’s no one, just a name. Do you know the Oasis song, “Don’t Look Back in Anger” and the girl Sally they mention? We’ll say that Ruby is her very distant cousin.

You guys are proper stars overseas. How do you feel about the fame?

toes, the Kaisers have emerged, senses of humor intact and only moderately jaded, if the cheeky title of their latest, *Yours Truly, Angry Mob*, is any indicator. And though the band eschews the songwriting tricks that made *Employment* such a fetching proposition, the mob should be happily swayed once more. For crowd pleasers, look no further than the chant-along chorus of “Ruby,” the “I Predict a Riot”-esque “Heat Dies Down” and the “Wool!”-worthy “Highroyds.” There are some more esoteric moments, like the Baines-sung romp “Boxing Champ” and the tongue-in-cheek ballad “Love’s Not a Competition (But I’m Winning),” but overall *Yours Truly, Angry Mob* continues the high-octane Red Bull Britpop of the band’s memorable debut.

It should be hard to pin down the Kaiser’s Chieftain to chat about life as one of Britain’s most popular exports—everyone wants a piece of the action—but when we catch up with him he’s at home on the couch in front of a roaring fire. Away from his own mob, Ricky is engaging to the nth degree, equal parts smart-ass, jaded rock and roller, and apologetically nice guy.

I was shopping for a mirror the other day—not that I’m vain or anything—and I saw a guy in a shop who just looked like a rock star. He had this hairdo that was all over the place, about 12 scarves around his neck and this belt buckle that in huge letters said “FAMOUS.” I thought it was hilarious, because I was in this lumberjack shirt and rain jacket and my hair was all messy. No one recognizes me in the street, because I don’t go out to get recognized. If I did, I’d be wearing stripey blazers and going, “Ohhhhhhh.”

#### Who do you feel is making worthwhile music these days?

The Arctic Monkeys are important, but I always feel like a dickhead talking about buzzword bands that are obviously good. It reminds me of when someone dies and they bring in loads of indie pop stars and ask, “How do you feel about Arthur Lee from Love dying?” And some crappy indie musician says, “Yeah, it’s a great loss, man. We feel it in our hearts.” And I’m thinking, “You’re 17 and you’ve never even heard of him.” When people ring me up about stuff like that, I just say I don’t care. If it’s Liam Gallagher talking about one of the Beatles, I might give a shit.

#### Speaking of sound bites, you quipped in an MTV doc, “When you come to America, you have to suck a lot of dick.” Any trepidation about going back to the States?

The first time we needed to suck a lot of dick to break in. We’re through the door enough so they know how good we are.

#### Not even a jiggle of the balls this time around?

I’m not going near their balls or their dicks. They can just sit back in their chairs and wank about how much money we’re making them. **F**