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# Coldplay

**EXCLUSIVE  
INTERVIEW**

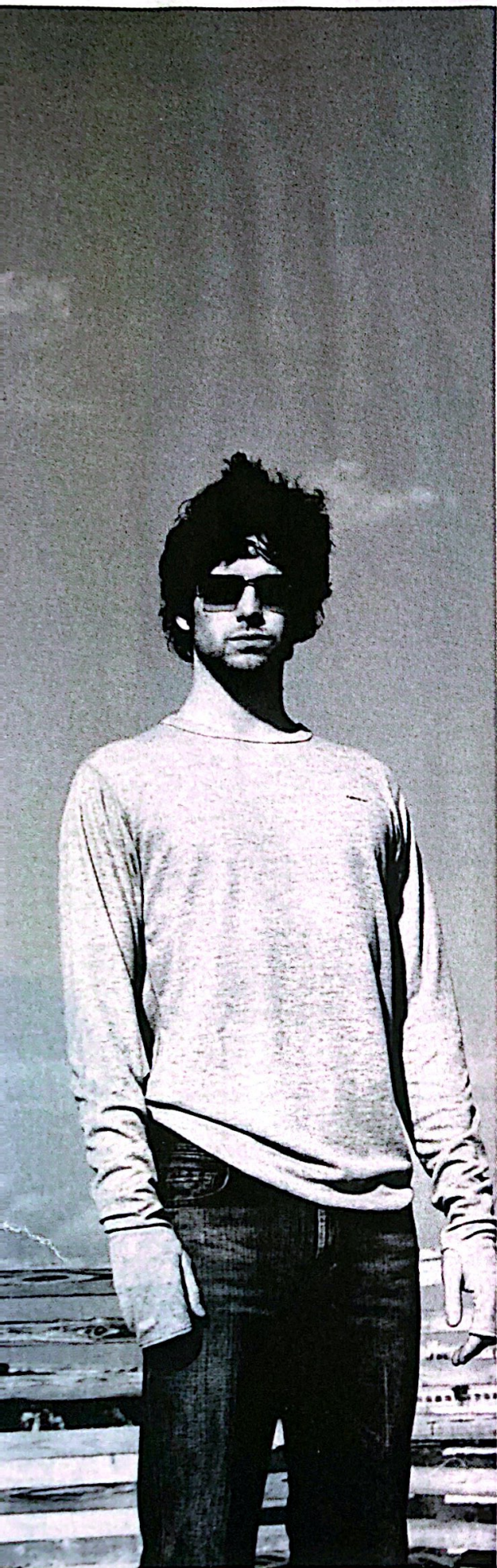
"I WILL LAMP ANY IDIOT WHO SAYS WE'RE NOT ROCK'N'ROLL"

**The Libertines And Yeah Yeah Yeahs Take Stage Front**

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L to R:  
Will Champion,  
Chris Martin,  
Jonny Buckland,  
Guy Berryman

# RUSH HOUR

**COLDPLAY** offered us an exclusive meet-up, so we said "let's". Following a brace of Brit awards, and as new single 'Clocks' hit the racks, we hooked up to talk 'fame'.

Text: Siobhan Grogan, Photography: Kevin Westenberg

**NEW YORK, August 2002.** In a small, sweaty dressing room at the city's Bowery Ballroom, Chris Martin is in his element. An attractive girl sits either side of him, spellbound by his charming English manners and giddy aftershow euphoria. Noel Gallagher has just made his excuses and headed home while brother Liam is on the other side of the room, bobbing up and down to The Beatles album on the stereo and singing along loudly. Coldplay have just played one of the best gigs of their lives to 600 speechless New Yorkers and are further buoyed by the surreal news that one Gwyneth Paltrow was in the audience. Life just doesn't get much better.

Fast forward six months and Chris Martin, Guy Berryman, Jonny Buckland and Will Champion already inhabit a different world. They're back in Britain for a week to perform haunting new single 'Clocks' at the Brits ceremony and pick up awards



for Best Album and Best British Group. The following day they will return to America by Concorde to play the Grammys and they have just announced their next date in New York will be at the legendary 15,000-seater Madison Square Gardens. Martin, meanwhile, has paparazzi watching his every move and is now a regular, if unwilling, fixture on the tabloid gossip pages thanks to his relationship with Ms. Paltrow.

That doesn't stop him looking like he wishes it would all go away today, though. It's the day before the Brits and the band have been rehearsing at an icy Earls Court since ten a.m. They have played 'Clocks' approximately 15 times while lights and sound levels are tweaked imperceptibly

around them. Buckland has his hood up and a glazed look on his face, while Martin is hunched over his piano, a woolly hat pulled over his eyes and nose. Whether he's absorbed in his own world or wishes he could escape from the one outside is anyone's guess.

"We're a bit anti-interview at the moment," Chris sighs in one of the band's two dressing rooms later. Normally he is an exhausting, captivating bundle of nervous energy. Today he looks on edge. "We can't believe how receptive people have been to our second record, you know, but we always worry about something, so we're worried about our backlash, or the next record, and all that sort of stuff."

There are few bands as besieged by

get ready  
grenade a  
woman on  
first floor

contradiction and division as Coldplay. Their recent second album *A Rush Of Blood To The Head* has already sold 4.5 million copies worldwide, but they continue to make some people's blood boil (Alan McGee famously declared them 'bedwetter's music'.) And while Coldplay's music has become inescapable, the band themselves remain virtually anonymous, apparently reluctant in their superstardom. Even Martin, who plainly basks in the limelight and celebrity shoulder-rubbing (and let's face it, no one held a gun to his head over Gwyneth), sometimes seems petrified it will slip through his fingers, paranoid anyone would think he was taking it all for granted and anxious to stress over and over again, to the point of tedium, how he can't complain about anything. Coldplay think they're the best band in the world, of course, but perhaps it feels like bad manners to admit it too often.

"The way I look at it," Martin insists softly, "is we've been given this amazing life and we have to make the most of it. The other day I went to see Sigur Ros, and when you see a band's gear set up, you always get this feeling of 'oh, I want to do that one day'. And then you realise: I do it already. I did it yesterday. So we have to try and worry as little as possible about what everyone else thinks, because everyone's just running scared of everyone else."

Unfortunately, Martin still admits to fretting about almost everything. Whether it's disbelief at how well everything has turned out or merely a defensive interview tactic to prove success has not gone to his head, he seems to thrive off worry.

"I couldn't be happier if I tried," he repeats defensively. "I'm in what I regard as being the greatest job I could ever have dreamed of with my best friends. But just when you sit back on your laurels and go, great, *Rush of Blood*... got four out of five in this magazine, then you hear 'Hot In Herre' by Nelly or something and think, God, we haven't got anything as good as that. It's constantly trying to compete with what you think is brilliant."

All the band admit they often doubt whether they are able to top *A Rush Of Blood*... ("particularly now Phil Spector's gone to prison," Martin adds) but the prospect of doing so is their ultimate motivation.

**"YOU HEAR 'HOT IN HERRE' BY NELLY AND THINK, WE HAVEN'T GOT ANYTHING AS GOOD AS THAT."**

"It's about wanting to be on a level with the records you were into when you were a kid. Or now," guitarist and pop's very own gentle giant Jonny Buckland explains. "Wanting to be as good."

Indeed, part of the reason Coldplay retain their edge – pushing a sound some believed was limited to create the astounding *A Rush Of Blood*... – is Martin's late musical education. Born in Devon, he attended a boarding school and hilariously admits all he listened to growing up was "me playing the piano and occasionally Sting". When he moved to London in 1996 to attend university, he started buying records. Had fate taken another turn, Martin guesses he would have ended up "doing Elton John covers in Marriott hotels up and down the country. Enjoy the buffet..." he ponders. "This is 'Rocket Man'." Luckily he met Berryman, Buckland and Champion within the week ("I knew that he was mad," the latter says of his first meeting with Martin. "Absolutely bonkers.") and something clicked.

"When we met it just seemed perfectly right," Buckland confirms matter-of-factly. "It couldn't possibly be any other way."

"Like falling in love," Martin adds.

In the ultimate happy-ever-after, Coldplay were signed to Parlophone by the time they had finished their finals, and released debut album *Parachutes* soon after. Finally discovering Oasis, The Flaming Lips, Nick Cave, Jeff Buckley and The Smiths, Martin's bright-eyed enthusiasm for great music couldn't be tempered, even by his first few brushes with fame. Having never enjoyed the teenage obsession with must-have records, Martin suddenly realised all he had been missing out on and embarked on a crash course in

music history. This passion remains one of the vital driving forces behind Coldplay, and the world has responded in kind. Every time Martin discovers a new great band (while writing *A Rush Of Blood...* it was U2 and Echo @ The Bunnymen; these days he can't get enough of The Cure), their music informs and improves his songwriting. It presents an opportunity for them to evolve in a way most bands cannot. Add ego to the mix and Coldplay don't just want to absorb that great music, they want to equal and better it.

"You've got to want to be the best band in the world," Champion reflects. "Otherwise there's no point. What is the point of joining a band and saying, 'right, let's form an average band. Let's be quite good'. If you don't think your music is going to add something to people's lives then there's no point in doing it. Every band should want to be the best."

Most bands do though, and many write great songs. Very few, however, will experience the level of success Coldplay currently enjoy.

"I don't know," Martin sighs wearily. "Just like we don't understand when someone doesn't like us."

Oh, come on...

"Why do I think genuinely people like us? Because I think we're the shit and we're the best band in the world of all time, but I wouldn't want to say that in an interview - although I just said it. That's why. Cos we sweat blood over every single piece of music we do and it's full of passion. Similarly, someone will read that and just laugh because they think we're the biggest pile of shit in the world, and there's people who've been ten times as successful as us that are absolute pants, so commercial success and how many records you sell doesn't

Confidence has come with the multi-million, award winning territory. Until now, they've had to go on instinct. When the band first began writing *A Rush Of Blood...*, several early songs were scrapped. The great second record they had been planning for months evolved into something quite different by the time they reached the studio. Berryman and Champion reckon they still write one terrible song for every great one, while Martin puts the figure "easily" at ten to one. Criticism infuriates and bewilders them but they have grown used to facing it and relished the pleasure of proving many cynics wrong with *A Rush Of Blood...* Winning people round has bolstered their self-belief and means Martin's fretful, super-sensitive persona of old is now a thing of the past. Like Coldplay's music, he has toughened up.

"I know a lot of people think we're bland, soft rock, coffee rock... I mean coffee table rock!" he chortles. "Actually. Hmm... coffee rock. We are coffee rock! I've just invented a new phrase. I should send it to Alan McGee. We're not all about torture and heartbreak, whatever anyone thinks. We are a big fan of the minor chord though."

These days, Coldplay say they no longer read their press. Martin is generally featured for all the wrong reasons (Imbruglia, Furtado and Paltrow to name three) while Buckland, Berryman and Champion are usually inaccurately described in the same breath as their singer.

"It doesn't bother me," Champion says dismissively. "If you believed everything you read about us in the press, we'd be an odd bunch of people, because we'd all be from Oxford and we'd all not drink. And we'd be a Christian rock band. We used to read all the press that we got, but that just turned us into fools."

"We've had so much bad stuff written about us and so much personal slagging off," Martin – the composite worrier – adds, "that I honestly try not to read it because I either get upset or I get an ego, and neither are healthy. So I may not be into drink and drugs, but that's not to say Jonny is or isn't. Each to our own."

Don't you ever want to lose control in a way only drink or drugs will allow?

"Occasionally. Occasionally. Sometimes I get a bit tipsy but... not really."

**"IF YOU DON'T THINK YOUR MUSIC IS GOING TO ADD SOMETHING TO PEOPLE'S LIVES THEN THERE'S NO POINT IN DOING IT."**

What do you drink?

"I don't know. I got given some Russian mead the other day. It was alright, but I don't drink really, so I wouldn't know."

However much Martin may enjoy his current fame, he is clearly anxious his new-found status does not overshadow the band and their music.

Is that a constant worry?

"Absolutely. That's why we don't talk about our personal lives and we don't turn up at anything and we don't court the press. We do one interview in Britain," he explains with a cursory nod towards the tape recorder. "The thing is, if we come up with good music, we'll be fine. If we come up with shit music, we'll be not fine, and it will be blamed on all these other things."

Fame can be an unwelcome fifth band member too. While Martin has become a tabloid fixture, Berryman, Champion and Buckland continue to enjoy relative anonymity and insist they are only ever recognised at their own gigs. What, then, do they make of all the attention Martin gets?

"We're actually closer than ever," Berryman counters. "I mean we spend nearly every day together so you can't just ignore something if someone's unhappy or upset."

"There's an awful lot of pressure on him because he's the recognisable one. He's the face and the voice," Champion comments. "But he's good at it... and we're probably not as good at being famous as him. But he's not Michael Jackson. He can still walk around. Anyway, I think you're as famous as you act. I could be incredibly famous by now – I'm positive of that – had I chosen to be at all the parties and get myself known. It's very easy but I choose

Is it a sneeze?  
Is it some phlegm?  
Martin shouts at a  
seagull

not to. It's an active choice not to get out there and whore ourselves to all the papers."

Does that mean Martin wants to be a celebrity, though he appears so uncomfortable with it today?

"There's a small part of every singer that wants to be a celebrity," he admits. "Not other musicians. But being famous is, of course, total bullshit. It's saying, you're more special because you're on the telly, and I mean, that's bollocks."

"You think you join this big pop star world where no one has a shit," Buckland reflects tastefully.

"That's true!" Martin laughs, "But once we step out of the concert venue, no one recognises us. It's great."

That's rubbish.

"Well I mean, sometimes..." Chris tempers distractedly. "It's different for each of us and it depends where you are. I love it when people come up and say I don't think you're rubbish. But basically I'm just giving hippy answers because there are no downsides to our job, and I think you make up downsides to it just so you can answer interview questions."

He shifts slightly in his seat, leaning forward to be heard over the strains of Pink's rehearsal that has just started in the adjoining arena.

"Listen," he points out. "I've got nothing to moan about and I'm not going to start now. I love it when people come up to me. Sometimes they're interested in things that I'd rather they weren't interested in but so what? I'm interested in things about people that they're probably not interested in me knowing about, so it's human nature."

Buckland chuckles at his waffle. "I still go shopping," he beams. "I go anywhere. No one ever recognises me."

"That's not true, is it?" Martin wonders.

"It's very rare. Maybe in a record shop or something, but not in Sainsburys."

"The head of Valentino has heard you're sexy," Martin says, spoken like a man with a toe in the world of high fashion.

"He probably thinks I'm Guy," Buckland grins. "Someone did recognise me the other day but they thought I was Guy."

"Are you sure they didn't say, are you that guy from Coldplay?" Martin asks, before musing, "Madonna's right in the

new Bond film," as he collapses in a fit of laughter. "Well, Freud, of course, ultimately... Destroy your ego. It's true, man. Egos are fuckers."

Not easy to remember when the paparazzi are camped outside your front door, though.

Martin shrugs. "The thing is, for a long time they weren't interested. I mean, 'Coldplay have a sandwich'. Or 'Liam Gallagher kills someone'. Which one are you going to go with? Obviously the sandwich... I'm frightened of the paparazzi, though. They scare me. But I'll be alright. We'll survive."

Whatever its trials, success – particularly in America – has assured Coldplay they need not conform to anyone else's rules. When everyone else turned to oversized jeans and nu-metal, then leather jackets and garage rock, Coldplay continued writing their own brooding, beautiful songs that said something to everyone about their lives. Call them unfashionable, the underdogs or tirelessly determined, but Coldplay are a fairy tale success story simply because they refuse to adhere to someone else's idea of what that should be.

"Rock'n'roll is doing what you believe in and I will lamp any idiot who says we're not rock'n'roll because they're fucking idiots," Martin rants. "I keep seeing, oh he's so boring, he just flies kites but that's what I want to do! That's what I believe in! I fly kites and I go running! It's geeky and stuff but it's also what I want to do. It just upsets me that people think rock'n'roll is doing coke off a TV or something and it's not. If that's what you want to do then great. But not if you're doing it just to conform to rock'n'roll. That's really boring."

Convinced he's finally said enough, Martin bolts for the door gratefully. Coldplay's music has already brought him wealth, fame and an implausible showbiz relationship, but he knows he can only stop talking about those things when he makes the perfect album, "the best record of all time". That, he's sure, will tell everyone all they need to know.

Coldplay's new single 'Clocks' is out March 24 through Parlophone. Chris Martin guest hosts Zoë Ball's show, on Xfm 104.9, on March 25. Listen out for a special announcement.

Up yours, doubters! Coldplay laugh off the slings and arrows of their detractors