

Richard Hawley was a member of 90s band Longpigs and has played with Pulp, Lisa Marie Presley, Duane Eddy and more



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Hawley's Juke Joint

WORDS BY STEVE O'BRIEN

With the release of his latest jukebox compilation, singer-songwriter Richard Hawley reveals himself as a true aficionado of rock'n'roll. We met the ex-Pulp guitarist and big beat obsessive to find out more...



Richard Hawley has something to show us. “You know the cover of the album,” he says, referring to the sleeve of his latest release, *Little Bangers From Richard Hawley's Jukebox Volume II*, “well, that's the actual jukebox.”

The 59-year-old singer-songwriter has positioned himself in front of his prized 1955 Wurlitzer 1800 specially for *Vintage Rock*. It is a strikingly handsome object, and clearly the much-cherished cornerstone of Hawley's rock'n'roll-themed man cave. There are guitars and music posters on the wall, some sleazy neon signage and a wealth of vinyl in the adjacent “vibology room”. “I drive my wife insane,” he laughs. “But she's very tolerant. She'll say to me, ‘Why do you have to have another 30 singles this week?’ and I'm like, ‘Because they contain information, babe, and I need this information.’ I mean, it never ends!”

It is this very – no pun intended – singular obsession that has fuelled Hawley's newest compilation. *Little Bangers Volume II* follows on from 2023's critically-adored *Volume I*, a cracking collection of 50s and 60s tracks that boasted enough curios to satisfy even the pickiest of greasers.

Volume II, then, offers up 28 more little bangers (so named because they're all “mini hand grenades”), a lovingly curated assemblage of obscure 45s and deep cuts from the likes of Elvis (the exhilaratory *Put The Blame On Me* from 1961 could and should have been a single), Gene Vincent (listen to *The Day The World Turned Blue* and you'll hear another side to the Screaming End) and Duane Eddy (“if you're driving on the freeway,” Hawley says of 1965's twang-tastic *Trash*, “it makes you want to move forward”) as well as many artists you've probably never heard of. Hawley is such an enthusiast and so passionate about every one of these 28, that, when we ask him which track he's most keen for people to hear, it is impossible for him to pin one down.

“Oh, all of them! *All of them!*” he says, excitedly. “I keep discovering these records, but what pisses me off is when you find an amazing tune and it's like \$500, and nobody's heard it. And you're thinking, that's criminal, because this music *needs* to be heard, because there's so much dreadful shit that takes up so much of our time.”

Hawley is, we hardly need to stress, no tourist in the world of rock'n'roll. He may have emerged from the indie



The new compilation album showcases 28 classic tracks



GOODE VIBRATIONS

If, we theorise, an alien spaceship landed on Earth and asked Richard Hawley what rock'n'roll is, what would he play them?

"Johnny B. Goode," he says, without a beat. "But I think there's quite a few contenders that you could boil rock'n'roll down to, like one of those sort of yellow tablets that you take to space as food. I mean, Eddie Cochran's *Somethin' Else* as well, with Earl Palmer on drums, that's a contender. It's a time traveller, that song. Even modern bands cover that track, because it's so good. It sums up that period of time, the 50s, which was basically the kind of candyflossy, fluffy thing that you see with middle class America, but there's something in it that's not as perfect. He doesn't get what he wants, he gets something that's a compromise. I've always loved it because of that."

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Hawley's hairstyle nods to his love of rock'n'roll

► scene of the 90s, playing guitar in the band Longpigs, but he was a bona fide rocker from the time he was a kid. He remembers being at school in Sheffield and getting into fights over the authorship of *Roll Over Beethoven* (“I got the Beatles fans to look under the song title, where the publishing credit was,” he smiles, “and I said, ‘What does that f**king say? Chuck Berry!’ But even then they wouldn’t have it”) and of visiting a record shop in his home town when he was just six where his father bought him a Little Walter album. “It was a bit of a loaded thing, because dad didn’t take me to the disco section” he laughs. “Instead, we were where blues and rock’n’roll were sold.”

It’s clear from our chat how critical Hawley’s dad Dave – who as a guitarist was a prominent figure on the Sheffield scene of the 50s and 60s – was to his son’s love of music. Richard tells us a story of when, in the late-90s while he was touring

The Fat Man doesn’t make it onto this volume of bangers, but several of Hawley Jr’s other heroes do. The singer is – and he has the quiff to prove it – a massive Elvis fan and is keen to rehabilitate the King’s image as someone who, after his Sun heyday, became increasingly conservative in his song choices.

“I love the early stuff,” Hawley tells us, “but what I’ve been listening to a lot lately is Elvis singing Dylan. That’s amazing, man, it just destroys any notion that Elvis was opposed to the counterculture of the time. I mean, it’s bollocks. I’ve worked with his daughter, she was a good friend, and I asked her about that, and she said, ‘That’s a lot of shit, dad was always looking for stuff, always searching.’ If you’re a creative human being, you’re predestined to be a searcher.”

Gene Vincent is another favourite that’s on the album, a singer Hawley calls “the dark angel of rock’n’roll”.

“I’m always drawn like a moth to a beautiful flame, to rock’n’roll and doo-wop and country hillbilly. It’s those three chords, man, I love them. It’s not even the music, it’s the sound.”

America with Longpigs, he saw Link Wray perform and got the surf guitarist’s autograph for his father. “Then, like a fucking idiot, I put it in an envelope and posted it, only it never arrived,” he says incredulously. “Why did I not save it?!”

Still, he got to meet one of his heroes that day. “Oh, he was amazing,” Hawley says of the King of the Power Chord. “But at the end, Link’s tour manager was screaming at him, ‘What the fuck are you drinking for, we’ve got a 600 mile drive!’ He was getting really browbeaten for drinking with us. But I did get 45 minutes – no one else was interested in talking to him.”

It was also Dave Hawley who introduced his son to the artist Richard admits he’d likely pick as his specialist *Mastermind* subject: Fats Domino. “I love Fats – I’ve just absorbed his music, it feels like part of my DNA. He’s who I model my singing on. He always made singing sounds so effortless, but if you try and do it, you f**king soon figure out it isn’t. My dad worked with him and said he was amazing and the most professional out of all the artists he’d met.”

“He had bad teeth, his hair was always a mess, and he just looked dangerous,” he says of one of 50s’ music’s most unsung talents. “And with that bad leg, he didn’t fit the mould. I think for the spirit of rock’n’roll, it’s Gene Vincent. A lot of big stars of the time, it was like they put a magnet on them and straightened out all the molecules, but no matter how many magnets you put on Gene, there was no fucking way those molecules were ever going to be straightened out. My dad worked with him and said he could be really gentle and kind one minute, then he’d be a f**king headcase the next. He was a very, very unpredictable person.”

There is, obviously, a stack of Elvis and Gene in Hawley’s vast collection of vinyl, but are there any artists or albums that get spun regularly in the vibology room?

“Oh, Fats, definitely, and I put on a Bo Diddley record at least once a day, every day,” he reveals. “I’m always drawn like a moth to a beautiful flame, to rock’n’roll and doo-wop and country and hillbilly. It’s those three chords, man,

I love them. The thing is, it’s not even the fucking music, it’s the sound of it. Don’t get me wrong though – I mean, there was a lot of crap in the 50s and 60s, a lot of landfill and cynical teen music.”

None of that cookie cutter guff, though, has made it on to *Little Bangers Volume II*. Hawley is a long-time aficionado of the compilation album (he says it was discovering a copy of 1984’s *Rockabilly Psychosis And The Garage Disease* in his wife’s record collection when they first started dating that convinced him she was the one), and even now he’s eyeing up tracks for a planned *Volume III*.

“There’s a song by Bob Landers called *Cherokee Dance* that’s going to be on the next compilation,” he teases. “I’ve written down a list of stuff – it’s not numbered, it’s just a load of records and Ace say they can get 10 or 11 compilations out of just that!”

Which will mean more sleeve appearances, we’re guessing, for that 1955 Wurlitzer 1800 (it appears on the cover of both volumes so far). “I’d wanted one of those ever since I first started listening to music,” he tells us about that mint-looking antique in the background of our Zoom call. “I tried for years to get my missus to let me have one. I mean, I can do what I f**king want, but you see, you’ve got to keep your missus happy.”

So is there anything else on Richard Hawley’s rock’n’roll wish list? He’s worked with many of his heroes, from Hank Marvin to Lee Hazlewood to Duane Eddy, but says there’s one item of rockabilly ephemera he’s yet to get his hands on. “I’d love a 1956 pink Cadillac,” he says dreamily, before adding, “but I’m never gonna have one. It doesn’t matter, though, I’ve got my jukebox.”

His 50s-styled den is the summation, he says, “of a lifetime obsession” and this new collection the result of decades of rifling through vinyl at jumble sales, thrift shops and record stores everywhere from Wakefield to Waco.

“It’s not an ego trip for me releasing these compilations,” he states. “I’ve got a pretty big fanbase now, and I guess folks listen to what I say, and I just want to make sure that what I say is of use and value to people, rather than just self-aggrandising bullshit. Because these compilations, I guess they’re a vanity project to a certain degree, but I really want folks to genuinely hear this music because I love it so much.” ★