



Falling *in* hate

Kylie Minogue, Bono, computers, reunion gigs, the Olympics — just some of the things The Fall's Mark E. Smith tells **Eamon Sweeney** that he hates

Not surprisingly, Mark E. Smith, the gnarled godfather of post-punk and one of the leading musical cult heroes of all time, doesn't care too much for fellow Mancunians the Stone Roses and their much-hyped reunion.

"You can't get away from them, can you?" Smith spits. "Y'know, they played three nights at the top of my street in Manchester? I don't really like them.

"My next-door neighbour went, but he's a Manchester United fan too. Heaton Park is not what it was either. When I was 16, I used to spend all my time there, but now it's just full of Mancs walking around."

Smith once memorably described himself as "northern white crap that talks back" and Ian McCulloch of Echo & The Bunnymen (who himself is nicknamed Mac the Mouth and has a penchant for egomania) famously opined that Smith is the most well-balanced person that he's ever met because he's got a chip on both shoulders.

Writer Sasha Frere-Jones astutely noted: "If you're alive, chances are that Smith has a grudge against you."

His legendary disdain is not just confined to the human race, as Mark E. Smith doesn't care much for computers either.

"I had a computer in 1983 and I got rid of it in 1985," he says.

"I don't like them at all. It's like the rain. It keeps people off the streets. I've got better things to do than look at a fucking computer. That's the way I am. It's sore on the eyes."

Perhaps Smith's distaste for the digital world was a good thing considering that in one of their more scathing moments, hipster indie online bible Pitchfork awarded the current gazillionth



Changes: Mark E Smith with The Fall, a band that has had numerous line-ups over the years

album by The Fall, *Ersatz GB*, just 2.2 out of 10.

"The younger guys keep up to date with all that stuff and obviously I know of it," he answers.

"I do think it could have been a lot better. I just found the original lyrics for *Nate Will Not Return* and I'm going to sing them on the Irish tour. The problem with that LP is the mix. They pressed the wrong mix. It's still alright.

"The idea was to rush it out before Christmas because supposedly you can't release anything over Christmas, but I think it's good and people have responded well to it."

As well as being one of rock's most notable eccentrics, Smith has a strong work ethic, authoring 29 studio albums and is a staunch follower of the Victorian historian Thomas Carlyle's philosophy: "Produce, produce — it's the only thing you're there for."

In addition to a sprawling back catalogue, Smith and The Fall are also a highly prolific touring outfit, even calling to the likes of Letterkenny and towns all around the country not visited by any international group since The Smiths.

"You're joking me?" Smith exclaims. "That's news to me. Why not go there?"

"New York is not America is it? London is not England. We're looking forward to it because it gets us away from the bleeding Olympics. Plus, I haven't been to Galway in years."

Of course, the adage goes that the modern age is a return to the troubadour days of musicians quite literally singing live for their supper.

"We've always done that though, right from

day one," Smith says.

"Now, everyone's crawling out of the woodwork. You know who started all that shit off? Bono (Smith pronounces it Bone-oh).

"Because he's in the select 3,000 members of the PRS — they're like the House of Lords or something. It was him and can you believe it — Kylie Mingoue — like what fucking songs has she wrote? And that c*nt out of the Undertones. He's the head of the Performing Rights Society."

You're referring to Feargal Sharkey?

"Yeah, yeah, who cares?" Smith says dismissively. "I'm not frightened of downloading, actually, I'm just cool with it because lots of young people stop me in the street and tell me they've downloaded *Hex Enduction Hour* or whatever."

The Fall's music has transcended generations thanks to its singularity and word of mouth.

They were the late John Peel's favourite band, who famously called them "always different, always the same".

Modern disciples include Stewart Lee and Danny Baker, but Smith completely clams up when their names are mentioned.

"Who the hell is Stewart Lee? Oh yeah, I know him. Isn't he the the guy on Pitchfork?" he mutters, before changing the topic of conversation entirely.

Smith's cryptic oeuvre and scatter-shot approach to lyrics has frequently been compared to Thomas Pynchon. He downplays the literary

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merits of his writing, claiming to lift many of his lyrics directly from sources such as Teletext.

One recent song is based on a survey commissioned by UK Prime Minister David Cameron to establish what makes English people unhappy.

"You had people writing in giving out about not being able to eat mushy peas anymore," Smith cackles.

"Another one was, 'Snow Patrol on the radio annoys me.'"

The end result is typical Smith; "I'm so sick of Snow Patrol, and where to find Esso lubricant and mobile number."

In the age of nostalgia, the perennial band reunions and retromania, The Fall and Mark E. Smith are an unlikely constant still weathering the storm and in Nick Cave's words, "kicking against the pricks".

"We never split up," Smith says proudly, even though he's the group's sole original member in a relentless revolving door line-up which on last count includes 66 former members, including a brief backing vocalist stint from Gavin Friday.

"I've always wanted The Fall to be the group that represents people who are sick of being dicked around; people who still have some fight in them."

The Fall play the Button Factory, Dublin, on Thursday, July 19, Roisin Dubh, Galway, on Friday, July 20, and the Pavilion, Cork, on Saturday, July 21



Prolific: Mark E. Smith and The Fall have released 29 studio albums

FOUR CLASSIC MARKE. MOMENTS The weird and slightly frightening world of Mark E. Smith...

NIGHTMARE ON NEWSNIGHT

When John Peel died in 2004, Mark E. Smith and Michael Bradley from the Undertones appeared on the iconic current affairs programme. In an interview that has been compared to George Best on Wogan, Smith bewilders presenter Gavin Esler by asking him if he's applying for John Peel's job and slurring incoherently. Smith has since said that he was very upset and saddened by the radio presenter's sudden death on the night in question.



MUMFORD & SONS — "RETARDED IRISH FOLK MUSICIANS"

"We were playing a festival in Dublin the other week (we assume he means Electric Picnic). There was this other group like, warming up in the next sort of chalet, and they were terrible. I said 'shut them c*nts up' and they were still warming up, so I threw a bottle at them. The band said 'that's the Sons of Mumford' or something, 'they're number five in charts!' I just thought they were a load of retarded Irish folk singers."



ON MODERN ATTITUDES TO BOOZE AND HEALTH

"I really can't stand it when blokes feel the need to comment on your drinking habits. It's rampant, all that malarkey: New Labour trying to keep people alive forever. "I don't see them berating the royals or the backbenchers about having a cig or a large gin at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. It's common knowledge that some doctors are the worst degenerates in existence."

BOOGIE-WOOGIE? NEIN DANKE

You could invite just about anyone from the music world onto Jools Holland, but trust Mark E. Smith to be a bit more contrary than most. He insisted on the following clause being written into the contract: "No boogie-woogie piano, Mr Holland. Otherwise The Fall will not appear." Smith reportedly delayed filming by wandering in and out of shot and calling Robert Plant some choice names. The Fall's performance of *Blindness* remains one of the finest in the show's illustrious history.

