



'I wasn't satisfied with what I'd got. And now I've got nothing'

Legendary DJ Andy Kershaw tells Time Out how 'nosiness' has been both his salvation and a factor in his self-destruction

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Andy Kershaw's rich Rochdale burr has been a unique voice in music for more than 30 years. He put on bands as entertainment secretary at Leeds University in punk's heyday, was tour manager for Billy Bragg, a groundbreaking BBC Radio DJ, a documentary-maker and roving foreign correspondent. He has championed world music (most famously The Bhundu Boys), reported from North Korea and genocidal Rwanda and won nine Sony Awards. In 2006-2008, the tabloids feasted on Kershaw's breakup with long-term partner Juliette Banner, and his subsequent breakdown. A lean, sober Kershaw bounced back to secure access to his children, present Radio 3's 'Music Planet' and write his autobiography, 'No Off Switch'.

Buoyant and passionate, he talked to Time Out over iced coffee and dandelion and burdock in a humid Exmouth Market.

You booked some massive names when you were at Leeds. What was that like?
'Absolutely extraordinary. Dealing with people you knew to be giants, like Elvis Costello. I caught the last flurry of creativity before rock music exhausted all the possibilities of four blokes with guitars, bass and drums.'

Was there really rock 'n' roll but no sex and drugs as Billy Bragg's tour manager?
'There was dope-smoking for me, but Billy was suspicious of that. And precious little leg over. I pay tribute to one Dutch girl I should have stuck with, but it's a long Kershaw tradition of having beautiful girls, treating them appallingly and losing them.'

Why?
'Well, being thrown into that way of life, having an easy-come, easy-go attitude and being 23 and randy.'

Your book honours John Peel but won't its criticisms of him surprise some people?
'Why shouldn't I be critical? There has been a deification of John without any analysis of the



'And another thing about John Peel...' Kershaw bonds with troops in Rwanda

complex figure he was. Here is an analysis by someone who did know him well. He was as flawed as the rest of us. He was very, very ambitious and had a fantastic flair for sensing which way the wind was about to blow.'

Why couldn't you do that?
'Why didn't I pretend to like dance music? Why didn't I change my accent twice in my broadcasting career? Come on... It's as authentic as Tim Westwood, and that's as authentic as me presenting my programmes in a Congolese accent.'

The Bhundu Boys broke up, and your friend Biggie Tembo committed suicide. Are you now more wary of promoting developing-world bands?

'No. Biggie wouldn't have wished it to go sour like it did. But to have achieved all he did against all expectations, I don't think he'd have missed that for the world. When I was getting hints of things going awry for Biggie in Harare, I should have flown down. I never got in that state myself, four years ago, but I know how important it was that somebody took the trouble to pick up the phone and say, "Are you doing alright?" I didn't do enough of that for Biggie. And I still miss him, I really do.'

What continues to fuel your curiosity about the world?
'Sheer bloody nosiness. Not just for music but everything. It's all too interesting.'

What has radio got over other media?

'Intimacy. It has an intimacy television can never have. The great broadcasters, like Peel, have that.'

You're very optimistic. Didn't the Rwandan genocide crush that out of you?

'Funnily enough, no. It was horrific and did make you ask how one human can do this to another. But I also saw something equally uplifting: a bunch of Rwandans swept across the country and put a stop to it. Some of those heroes were children. Not only did child soldiers save my life, they saved thousands and thousands of Rwandans.'

How did you cope with the fear when you were in Rwanda, Haiti or Angola?

'The nosiness and that desire to see it for yourself overcomes a lot. And your chances are better than your fears tell you. You have more chance of being mugged here than in Port-au-Prince. We all like scary fairground rides. If you are spiralling out of the sky above Angola, to avoid surface-to-air missiles, into a warzone...'

...it's Alton Towers South?

'It's Alton Towers South. And it's a high when you get out of it, you have an intensified sense of "I've got the job done".'

After your relationship broke down, you said you shouldn't have had so many affairs. Why did you? You weren't 23 any more.

'Good point. Boredom, restlessness, nosiness again. It's about new and different experiences. I wasn't satisfied with what I'd got. And now I've got nothing. Ha! Nothing in a romantic sense. I can't upset anyone because there is no one to betray.'

If you have no off switch, do you at least have a dimmer switch now?

'Give over! I've found the overdrive button!'

'No Off Switch' is published by Serpent's Tail at £18.99. See our review, p66.