



The North Star

SHEFFIELD'S FAVOURITE MUSICAL SON, RICHARD HAWLEY, TELLS MATT FROST ABOUT HIS MOST CHALLENGING ALBUM TO DATE

■ For years, Richard Hawley seemed pretty content as a sideman. Having emerged in the early '90s with promising yet ultimately ill-fated Sheffield indie band The Longpigs, Hawley went on to lend his considerable guitar skills to Pulp, alongside the odd smattering of session work for everyone from Robbie Williams to All Saints. However, since shifting to centre stage in 2000, unleashing both his velvet rich voice and achingly beautiful songwriting on an unsuspecting public, the solo career of Mr Richard Hawley has burned ever brighter with each subsequent release. His third full-length album, *Cole's Corner*, released in 2005, earned Hawley a Mercury Music Prize nomination, while 2007's *Lady's Bridge* broke the top 10. So, where does he go from here? ➤

Gutter Pressure

Hawley's latest album, titled *Truelove's Gutter*, is set for release in late September 2009. But what effect has the unexpected – though not undeserved – commercial success of *Lady's Bridge* had on this new record?

"I was deliberate about what I didn't want to do, which was repeat myself," explains Hawley, as we sit sipping tea in the control room of Sheffield's Yellow Arch Studios, which serves as Hawley's home from home.

"The success of the last record completely threw me. I wasn't expecting that at all," he continues. "And, being a bit longer in the tooth, I was very conscious that it would have been easy to do another album of three minute radio-friendly pop songs and possibly – for want of a better expression – rake it in, but I just didn't wanna be guilty of creative cowardice.

"I wanted to dispense with the issue of the three-minute pop song because, worldwide, there's kind of a cult of getting obsessed with the soundbite. Things are getting shorter and shorter and it's like reading a sentence rather than a whole book, do you know what I mean? I wanted to make a record that was like a listening experience from beginning to end... something that had a mood to it."

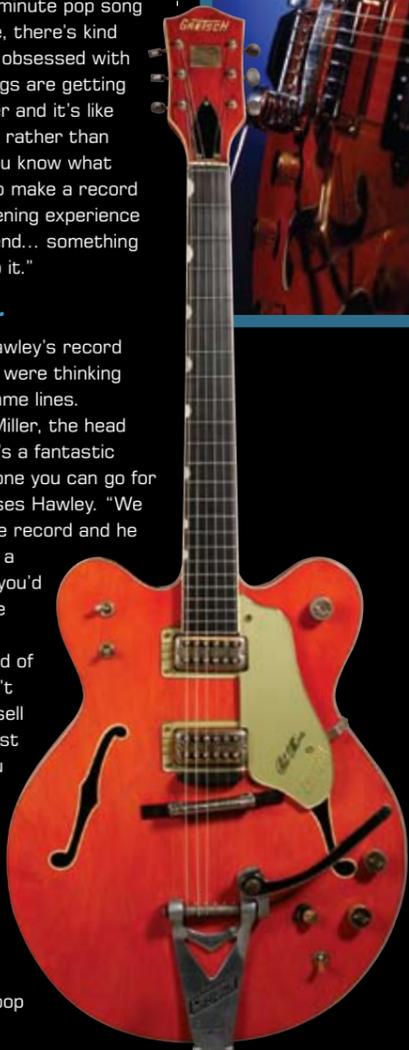
Silent Partner

Thankfully, Hawley's record label, Mute, were thinking along the same lines.

"I spoke to Daniel Miller, the head of the label, and he's a fantastic bloke... he is someone you can go for a pint with!" enthuses Hawley. "We were discussing the record and he said, 'Have you got a record in you that you'd like to make but are slightly afraid of?'"

I said, 'I'm not afraid of making it, but I don't know whether it'd sell anything,' and he just says, 'Well, can you make that one?' And it was like red rag to a bull! It was like, roll your sleeves up and get really stuck into the music.

"It's an art and a craft to write a pop



song, but I'd reached the limits of my exploration with that. I think I'd become fairly proficient at it and I just wanted to do something else. Once that issue of 'right, where's the single?' is dispensed with, it's immensely liberating. There's no rules there. I just wanted to push myself as a writer and, as a guitar player, I wanted to let go and play, which I did to a certain degree on certain tracks. And I pushed myself as a lyricist and as a producer and everything. I think it's important to keep wriggling... for your own soul."

Not Shy Away

The album title, like most of its predecessors, was inspired by Sheffield. *Truelove's Gutter* was an ancient Sheffield street named after an innkeeper who used to charge local residents to pour their refuse down his river-bound gutter.

"The juxtaposition of those two words 'Truelove' and 'gutter' – that seemed to me to somehow sum the record up," says Richard. "A lot of things in life are meant to enrich us, experiences that we have, but very often they end up not doing so, they end up taking stuff away and you feel a sense of loss rather than gain. The whole record for me was about not shying away from anything musically or emotionally. It was the toughest record to make."

Listening to the exquisite *Truelove's Gutter*, Hawley has certainly stayed true to his vision and held nothing back, whether in terms of some dark, emotional and personal subject matter, the let-them-breathe length of the songs or the experimental sounds from a range of rarely-heard, esoteric instruments that crop up across the record, among them the Megabass Waterphone, musical saw and glass harmonica.

Gretsch Galore

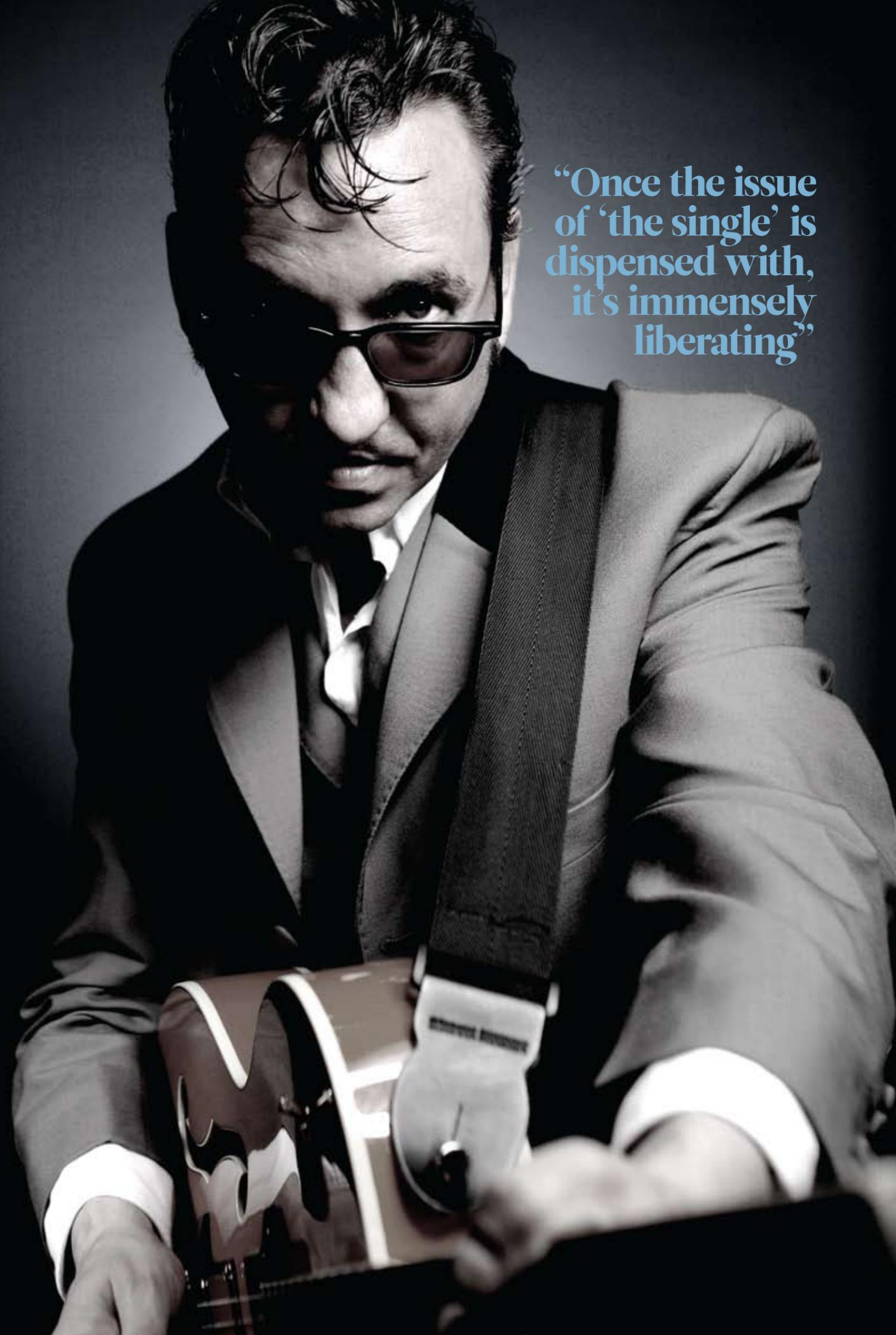
However, a Richard Hawley record just wouldn't be a Richard Hawley record without a shed-load of superb guitar tones, tasteful licks and beautiful guitar solos.

"I used a lot of Gretschs [on *Truelove's Gutter*] because they're just my favourite guitars to play," says Richard. "I'm a fairly big guy and, though I love Telecasters and I love Fenders, I find I wrestle with them a lot more. Gretsch sent me up the 125th Anniversary – the one with the 'jaguar tan' finish on it – and I used that a lot.

"It's got these TV Jones PowerTron pickups on it... although I never really think, 'Ooh, it's got them pickups, therefore it must be good!' The proof is always in the pudding. You can read as much as you want about a guitar but the proof is always in 'plug it in, play it'."

"I used the 6120 with the P-90 in it a lot too, and I used the old Nashville on a few things. I've also just got a Gretsch 6196 [Country Club] in cadillac green that I used on the track 'Ashes On The Fire' – that's got some right balls to it! Then the old lake placid blue '63 Fender Jaguar – that's unreal, that. When you play an instrument like that, you can see why people piss their pants over the pre-CBS Fenders, because they're just a universe apart."

“Once the issue of ‘the single’ is dispensed with, it’s immensely liberating”



"There are other guitars that I used, though, like an old Silvertone from the '50s with lipstick pickups – the sound of it is so amazing – and an old Burns, a little black Nu-Sonic, which is on some stuff. It's got that 'hrrraang' to it, you know?"

Make It A Double

When it comes to amps, Hawley likes to double things up, using different amp combinations to get different tones. "I always use two amps together and record it in stereo, but separate them off quite a lot, so if you want it to be mono, you can make it so," says Richard.

"I've got a Fender Prosonic that's a right warhorse – it's been around the world with me, that has.

I bought it the first week I started working with Pulp. The Prosonic is kind of the mainstay but I use it in stereo with either a Fender Deluxe or with an old 1963 Fender Tremolux. The Prosonic's quite harsh. I don't mean that in a bad way, but it's sound is very direct so adding the Tremolux kind of softens that off.

"I also use what I call a 'double Wemmy' for anything where I need a bit more aggression. I've got two WEM Dominator amps that I picked up for 30 quid each, and they're great. They just add an immediate edge to things. They're fantastic if you've got a guitar with single-coil pickups like the '63 Fender Jaguar – you plug that in and it's 'Hello!'. I also use a Burns Orbit 2 amp a lot. It's a transistor amp but it's immense. The fucking volume off it's unreal – it can kill ya!"

Delay Lines

Richard Hawley's tone can often be found swimming around in various echoes, tremolos and delays, but it's the effects on his vintage amps that he turns to first when seeking the right vibe for a particular track.

"I've got an old Dunlop Univibe and a Boss Tremolo but I prefer to use the amp tremolos if I can," he says. "You get some really interesting effects when you use two in stereo. Because they're never in time, you get this kind of sound that's chasing itself and it's quite interesting. I also use an Electro-Harmonix Holy Grail reverb, which is great and can be quite extreme."

When Richard Hawley feels like



Hawley has built up an impressive collection of lap steels over the years

"I prefer to use amp tremolos if I can"

dipping into a bit of distortion, there's one particular pedal he never tires of turning to. "I really only ever use one distortion pedal, and that's this Ross pedal that I got when I was 13, when I swapped it with my next-door neighbour for a fishing reel," says Hawley.

"It's got this creamy distortion but the control knobs fell off years ago. That's got a great sound and it has to be maintained regularly. I have to make sure that it's clean because it's pretty knackered – it's been stomped on so many times – but I've used it throughout my career from my first ever band right up to last week... but I've never been able to find another one."

Country Gentlemen

Richard Hawley cites many rock 'n' roll guitar greats as significant influences – Gene Vincent guitarist Cliff Gallup, Scotty Moore, Eddie Cochran and also Buddy Knox, whose solo in 'Party Doll' was the first thing Richard ever taught himself as a six-year-old.

However, it's the recordings of harmonica player Little Walter that he singles out for special praise. "The interplay between his guitar players was so intricate – it was like weaving," says Richard. "That's influenced me and Shez [Sheridan,

guitarist in Hawley's band] a lot – the idea of it sounding like one guitar almost. They used to detune their guitars because they didn't have a bass player in the band. The intricate weaving that they do is so beautiful when you listen to it and it's quite hard to fathom and definitely very hard to master.

"It's about leaving space for the other player instead of just trying to get your shit across. It's the art of leaving room for someone else, and me and Shez do that a lot. It's a gentlemanly thing – it's not about ego, it's about complimenting each other. On 'Remorse Code', there's →



a lot of the intricate acoustic stuff and if you listen to a lot of my other stuff, there's a lot of interplay. Shez is a great listener and it's all about listening more than you talk – listen to the other musicians! It's definitely an art that I'm definitely still learning all the time."

Family Ties

Two of the biggest influences on Richard Hawley's life have been his father, Dave, who sadly succumbed to cancer in 2007, and his uncle, Frank White – both Sheffield guitar legends.

Dave Hawley played guitar with Muddy Waters, Sonny Boy Williamson, John Lee Hooker, Memphis Slim and a host of other top American blues artists when they toured the UK back in the '60s. Frank White, meanwhile, played with Dave Berry & The Cruisers for several years, during which time he became famous for his use of the DeArmond volume pedal, an early precursor to the wah. The sounds his father and uncle used to get out of that early DeArmond unit would help produce one of Hawley's favourite guitar moments on the new record.

"[Frank] and my Dad influenced me on one big sound on 'Open Up Your Door'," he explains. "It's a different pedal to the DeArmond but I've got one that was kind of a re-make of it called a Shadowtone because, obviously, Hank Marvin used to use it and the sweep is very subtle on it. When I played that solo on there, that was a lovely moment. We just sat still and kept listening to it over and over again. I was supposed to carry on recording something else and I just said, 'One more time! Can I hear it again?'"

"I played that on an old [Gretsch] Country Gentleman through the DeArmond-type pedal. That also had the Digitech backwards pedal that I use a lot – but very subtle – then I also used a [Roland] Space Echo and, I think, a compressor."

Spotty Herbets

With *Truelove's Gutter*, Hawley has produced one of the records of the year thus far: a dark, beautiful, intensely creative musical journey into the rugged depths of the human soul. But,

before we part, Hawley is very keen to point out that the contributions of his bandmates – keyboard player John Trier, guitarist Shez Sheridan, drummer Dean Beresford and bassist and co-producer Colin Elliot – should not be underestimated.

"I couldn't make the music that I do without Colin and the lads," he says. "They're never overbearing, their influence is always subtle and they're gentlemen, all of 'em, and I have a great laugh with 'em."

As the interview comes to a close, we thank Richard for his time and apologise for having taken up so much of it. "It's alright, it's okay – I'm just talking about guitars and I could sit here all day talking about guitars. That's what it's all about, innit? When all the bollocks is gone – all the airy fairy shite – it'll all be back to just loads of spotty herbets sitting round playing guitars. That's what it's all about." **CB**

■ *Truelove's Gutter* is out on Mute Records on September 21st and Hawley's UK tour commences on October 1st. Visit www.richardhawley.co.uk for more info

ATKIN AFFAIR

HAWLEY ON HIS CUSTOM ATKIN ACOUSTIC

Richard Hawley wrote the majority of *Truelove's Gutter* on his *Atkin OM* acoustic, which he believes is one of the best acoustic guitars he's ever owned.

Two bespoke *Atkin* jumbos, with Everly Brothers-style pickguards and 'Hawley' inlaid across the fretboard, come a close second. "I can genuinely say – as a guitar player that's been playing since I was a boy – that *Alister* [*Atkin*]'s acoustic instruments are the best that I've played," enthuses Hawley. "They're on a par with a lot of old vintage stuff that I've had the pleasure of playing – old *Martin D-18s* and [*Gibson*] *J-200s* – and it's because they're made with love. That's the fundamental difference.

It's a bespoke piece of equipment that you buy that's made with love. I just can't say enough about *Alister* as a person and his guitars. And I'm not being sponsored, by the way. I have to pay for the fuckers! But they're worth every penny..."

