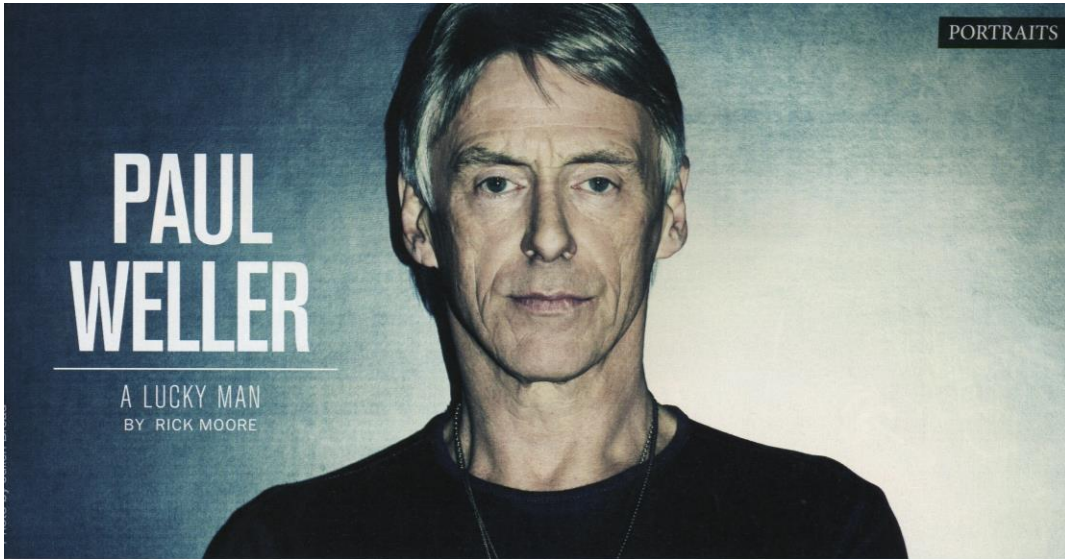


American songwriter

the craft of music

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PORTRAITS

PAUL WELLER

A LUCKY MAN
BY RICK MOORE

Few British artists have been as influential and popular post-Beatles in the U.K. as Paul Weller. Starting in his mid-teens, Weller was the main force behind The Jam, a band that fused punk energy with more musicality than groups like The Sex Pistols or The Clash. The Jam actually sang and played in tune, and while they attacked authority like other punk bands, they did it with influences ranging from the Fab Four and Motown to Merseybeat and R&B. The Jam helped usher in the Mod Revival movement (think The Who's *Quadrophenia*), and they always looked sharp, a trend that Weller carried over to his next band, The Style Council. Today he not only still dresses to the nines, but also has his own line of men's clothing.

Pegged with the nickname "The Modfather," Weller embarked on a highly successful solo career after leaving The Style Council, and has since been one of the British music industry's most-awarded artists. His new album *Saturn's Pattern* is an energized collection that features everything from psychedelic-era heaviness ("White Sky") to straight-ahead garage rock ("Long Time") to the Britpop-influenced vocal of the title track, and it shows that Weller hasn't lost a step. He wrote all of the lyrics and most of the music on the album, and played everything but drums and violin. It was produced and recorded in his studio with some of his usual collaborators. "We couldn't afford L.A. prices," he said,

somewhat tongue-in-cheek via phone from England. "I think it sounds good."

Some artists spend their careers relying on the income from one or two hits, or spend their lives on the road keeping a band name in front of the public with only one or two original members. But Weller has somehow managed to do well recording whatever he wants. "There's no real recipe for success, man," he says. "I just want to move on to other things. It just doesn't interest me to re-form an old band and do all that old smashing, that kind of nostalgic thing, you know. I couldn't do that anyway, I really couldn't. It just doesn't interest me."

Weller is as much of a rock star today as he ever was. At press time, he is slated to perform on closing night at Glastonbury Festival 2015, followed only by the event's headliner of headliners, The Who. Weller recently played some dates in the U.S. and Canada in support of *Saturn's Pattern*, and is scheduled to do the same in Europe. "It's incredible," he says. "I'm amazed and grateful that I'm still able to go out [on tour], and it's so good to see younger people [in America] coming out, as well as people who grew up with my music. What more could you ask for, man? The first time I came to America was with The Jam, we played CBGB's, two shows a night for two nights. And then we played the Whisky in L.A. I have such a passion for it, I couldn't imagine not playing live."

"There's no real recipe for success, man."

In America, the song Weller may still be best known for is The Jam's "Town Called Malice," a biting look at the hopelessness of living in a town with little opportunity. An American favorite in the early days of MTV, it's a textbook example of Weller's writing style of being seemingly unconcerned about whether or not anything ever rhymes, with the goal obviously being to get the point across with the best words possible. Nearly four decades later, he still writes pretty much the same way on *Saturn's Pattern*.

Where a lot of older artists of any genre or nationality are quick to slam what the kids these days are doing, Weller isn't one of them. Which is somewhat surprising, as the apparently mellowing Weller once had a reputation for not being all that complimentary of the work of many artists. "There's a lot of great stuff out there, man," he says. "I think the Alabama Shakes are great, I like their new record. Sam Smith's great. And I really like a group from Scotland called Young Fathers. There's plenty of great stuff around."

Now 57, Weller is the father of 3-year-old twin sons, who he admits have changed his perspective in many ways. "I think it stops you from being cynical," he says. "And I'm a lucky man, a lucky man to have twin boys at my tender age. I'm definitely at a good place in my life. I'm happy. I'm content with what I've got." ★