



the bad seed

04 – SUGARLESS

BE CAREFUL OF OVERGROWN MEN WITH SMALL-TOWN IDEAS. BY WAYNE FLASK

I have strange habits. One of them is the occasional skim through Noel Gallagher's blog, probably just a way of bringing down the wall of distance between musician and fan.

Swinging from the occasional swipe at younger brother Liam ("like a man with a fork in a world of soup") and

rumbling noises about a solo project, Gallagher Snr's blog is mostly a tongue-in-cheek account of life on tour.

In a recent post, Gallagher hit out at the revered music zine NME for inciting a feud between Oasis' support bands (The Enemy, Kasabian and Reverend and the Makers). The evil deed required a steady make-good. "If you see a weasel from NME at any of our gigs... give them a clip around the ear hole and tell 'em to behave."

Case closed.

I'm pleased to know, six months and three features down the line, that The Bad Seed has earned enough brownie points to elevate itself to "Weasel" status. I'm chuffed to bits.

The honourable title comes courtesy of the very first feature of this series, where my assessment of the MMAs didn't go down too well with the mouthfuls of ego on which some "people in the know" seem to feed themselves. Not that a

couple of nasty looks and the occasional grunt will scare me. Yet, I am at pains to keep the hypocrisy of some of Malta's top entertainers to myself.

Let's face it, jet-setting in Malta is a beautiful world: the photos with fans, white toothy smiles, sweaty handshakes, sweaty clubbing, TV appearances, advertising voice-overs... the lot. And then, of course, all the gospel-tinted emails and Facebook posts, often exuding an elusive charisma that surfaces only when key events are close.

All this flirting with Lady Sympathy jars with the way these same people handle their critics. Paranoia about the loss of greatness sets in early. If The Bad Seed, or any other critic for the matter, affords a degree of petulance, it's not because the bigger bull is easier to hit with the banjo; it's because egos are meant to be kept in check.

I like to compare this to a football player hounded by the media after a string of horrific performances. Would he resolve to train harder, or phone up every editor in town to vent his spleen? Also, should the media drop their criticism because of the player's popularity?

In Malta, sweating to reach the higher ground isn't popular. Instead, the rare poor review lands you with a couple of angry phone calls, peppered with the odd veiled threat and a reminder to keep off the wrong toes. Some journalists, and worthy ones at that, have also been served with a lawsuit, which should

remain the last bastion against any purported infamy.

There again, this is lovely Malta, the place where criticism is a luxury reserved for the political parties and their scribes. Just try and criticise someone in the entertainment arena and you will see our ageing, overweight celebrity class (I think I've written this somewhere else already) taking umbrage at a line that doesn't rhyme with grandiose aspirations.

The reactions often stoop to ridiculous non-celebrity-like lows. During my thankfully trophy-less career I have been accused of despising a band because a distant relation of mine played the keyboards for their (psychological) rivals. Truth be told, there was a crucial abyss in quality between the two, and at the time I thought leaving out that line would only be courteous.

My phone has been bombarded twice in four years by the same singer for casually suggesting they didn't deserve two particular awards. In the first case, said vocalist even went as far as asking for a copy of my article before it had gone to print – somehow sensing I was going to disagree with the winners list.

If this is not playing in the defence, then what is?

I sought comfort in the words of Malta's most terrifying critic, Mona of www.planetmona.com, who has had it so much tougher than most of us armchair moaners.

"In their kitchens and their restaurants, chefs really feel that they are celebrities. If they have been on television, presenting whichever disastrous concoction, they really do start to believe their own hype.

"Mona's Meals has been on the local horizon for the past nine years and when it comes along writing what most of their customers have been feeling, restaurant owners do not take it lightly.

"In the history of the column, two have resorted to the courts. One lost the case outright and the other is still grappling with finding a reason why his restaurant should not have been critiqued."

One restaurant owner even banned her from her restaurant after she down-starred them from a 4* to a 3. There is a silver lining though. "A few intelligent chefs take the criticism as a free inspection and fix their shortcomings accordingly," says Mona.

Down in my playing field some few hectares away from Mona's we are still a long way from having artists, particularly the bigger acts, accepting a bit of fatherly advice; let alone sound criticism or, where needed, a bout of raspberries.

The bands that have made it have all learnt from their mistakes. It tells you a lot about ours who haven't quite been places, yet treat their little trophies as the gift of omniscience.

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