

RANDOM HOUSE *e*BOOKS



Bad Vibes

Luke Haines

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About the Book

Forget Blur/Oasis and Cool Britannia. None of that actually happened. *Bad Vibes* is the true story of English Rock in the nineties. Written with wit, brio and no small amount of bile, Luke Haines recounts how it felt to ride a wave of self-congratulatory success in a world with no taste.

As frontman of The Auteurs, Haines tells of supporting Suede, conquering France, and failing to break America. Of knuckle-headed musos, baffling tours and a swiftly unravelling personal life. And of what it's like to be on the cusp of massive success. And then watch it fade away.

Funny, honest and ridiculously entertaining, Luke Haines attacks anyone within rifle range, and is more than happy to turn the gun on himself. *Bad Vibes* is a brilliant memoir from a man who tells it how it was - and how he wishes it wasn't.

About the Author

Luke Haines was born in God's own county of Surrey in 1967. He has recorded five albums with the Auteurs, one album as Baader Meinhof, three albums with Black Box Recorder, one film soundtrack album and two solo albums. He has appeared on *Top of the Pops* and has been nominated for loads of awards but has won nothing. In 2003 Luke Haines was in *Debretts People of Today*. He thinks that he is no longer listed in this esteemed publication, as the free copy of the magazine hasn't been delivered for some time. It's not the end of the world. The author is married with one child.

Bad Vibes

Britpop and My Part
in its Downfall

LUKE HAINES



WINDMILL BOOKS

For Sian and Fred with love

Introduction

Back in August 2006, on the second night of my one-man show at the Edinburgh Festival, I was apprehended by a literary editor, several film producers, a crime writer and a prison officer and asked when my life story was coming out. I took the question as a *fait accompli*, as I do with most artistic endeavours that tickle my fancy, caught the train back to London and promptly did nothing about it. Six months later, while watching from the sidelines as my old record label (Virgin/EMI) crumbled, and recovering from the psychic wounds inflicted after a ghastly legal battle with yet another unscrupulous independent record label, I figured that now was the right time to write this memoir of my last decade in the twentieth century. Now that the house in the country, the sports car (with a boot not even big enough to hold my bespoke suits) and my last flush of youth had all gone, it was time to revisit the scene of a few old crimes. The book wrote itself.

The 90s: specifically 1992–7, which the body of this book is concerned with. The 90s: the dawn of post-fucking-everything, when I was in my twenties and my ego and I roamed about the globe, bickering and bitching like a couple of bad-tempered ogres. When I sat down to write this memoir I was surprised how much of this stuff was ricocheting about in my subconscious: youth, ambition, failure, depression, excess, spite and stupidity. Now I think it has stopped. I am a recovering egomaniac.

My twenties: when I was young and cruel. I want to stress that in writing this memoir I have spared the reader the dubious benefit of good old hindsight. The wisdom I

have added is that dreadful, creeping brand of morning-after sobriety, which I hope gives a far more accurate insight into my mindset during this period. All of which should be enough to reassure the reader that *Bad Vibes* is emphatically *not* an exercise in score settling, though due to the ‘in the moment transmission of my life’ style in which this book is written the casual reader may beg to differ. It is very much what I thought then, not necessarily what I think now. We have to tell the truth. Do we not? Also, I should state that I bear no ill will to the people and characters in this book, most of whom I don’t think about very often. When I do, it is only with fondness. Mostly.

Prologue

Is it ever right to strike a dwarf?

A strange thing happens at the beginning of 1993. I become a pop star. In France. Served up with the cornflakes. This turn of events takes everyone, not least of all me, by surprise.

My debut album – that is, the first album that I have written, played the lion's share of instruments on, arranged, and co-produced – *New Wave* is released in the UK and France simultaneously on 22 February 1993. In Blighty things are going swimmingly, better than I ever expected, but in France I am a palpable star. So much of a star that I idly toy with the idea of taking French lessons to improve my useless *franglais*. As it turns out, I'm just too busy pursuing my glamorous jet-setting lifestyle to do any thing as mundane as improve my continental linguistic prowess. I spend my honeymoon year of pop wonderment hurtling back and forth between London and France. *Perhaps the record company will rent me an apartment here in Paris? The 6th arrondissement would be nice.*

For the first few months after its release *New Wave* flies out of Fnac (record) stores the length and breadth of the republic at a rate of 10,000 copies a week. I am therefore required, by the laws of record promotion, to swim in the Gallic mainstream. Throughout the year I haughtily work my way through a glut of French television variety shows, appearing alongside jugglers, clowns, impressionists,

ancient chansonniers, gifted pets, strippers and disturbed child stars. It's a fucking blast. I even get to do press conferences, where I get to try out my sarky Dylan - in *Don't Look Back* - act on the ladies and gentlemen of the foreign press. For them my success is not such a fucking blast. Things are going well.

So, in the halcyon summer of '93, I find myself in Strasbourg, midway through our second headlining tour of France. The venue is sold out. The continental heat only heightens the expectations of the crowd. We, the Auteurs, played a storming set here just a few months ago and now tonight's lucky ticket holders want more of the old magic. It won't be hard, I say to myself - the band's sound is supremely confident, and I'm surfing wave upon wave of the stuff. *Tonight, ladies and gentlemen, Strasbourg is mine.*

We're just hitting the penultimate song - the as yet unreleased 'Lenny Valentino' - when I notice the audience surging forward. A dwarf has been hoisted to the front of the crowd. Man, that midget is ugly - and badly dressed - I think to myself, taking in his mullet, designer stubble and brightly coloured European leisurewear. Drunk too. Within seconds the little man is kicking my shins and biting my knees. I am now sharing the stage with an unfashionable, drunken and extremely aggressive dwarf.

I look across at the other members of my band to gauge their facial expressions and to confirm that this is really happening. It is: Alice Readman, our bassist and my girlfriend, is mortified. The Cellist has his head bowed. I glance behind me at Barney C. Rockford, our drummer, to see that even though he is in hysterics, he is still ably pounding away at his kit. I wonder what facial expression I should adopt, but it's difficult to know how to react when one is being viciously attacked by a dwarf in front of many people.

The stage is high enough to give the audience a clear view of the unfolding farce, and 2000 French fans stare at me in horror. They came here to commune with their songwriting genius hero, not see him upstaged by a fucking midget. By now the ugly troll is bouncing around - a demented little rubber man. He's not drunk, he's utterly smashed. I start the guitar intro to 'Early Years' and kneel down to dwarf level, so that I at least look like I am complicit in this awful scenario. My gambit fails. It now looks as though I am serenading the diminutive cunt. The audience are enjoying this unedifying spectacle even less than I am, so I rise to my full height. The laughing gnome turns to face the audience and dances mockingly in front of me. I wonder how hard I can kick him without killing him. If my Chelsea-booted foot can connect with his small arse then I can probably hoof the fucker far out into the crowd like a rugby ball. I bring my leg back and am just about to exert full force when the cavalry arrives. General Custer in an Emerson Lake and Palmer world tour T-shirt strides across the stage: Big Neil, our tour manager. At six foot six, the tallest man in the building. Big Neil does what he has been dreading having to do. He gently picks the little fella up - legs furiously pedalling in the air as he is lifted high into the lighting gantry - carries him offstage and deposits him outside the venue. The Auteurs take a bow to muted applause. I never return to Strasbourg. *Served up with the cornflakes?* French toast more like.

You look like a star but you're still on the dole

1986-91. In 1986 the NME releases C86, a state-of-the-nation cassette featuring among others Primal Scream, the Wedding Present and a west London group called the Servants. Elsewhere in 1986 the UK music press busy themselves by salivating over not-as-clever-as-they-think-they-are Sonic Youth and pretending to actually listen to the Butthole Surfers. By 1987 large swathes of the British public are contravening the natural impulse to be alone and are engaging in something called the 'second summer of love'. Steve Albini's new group are called Rapeman. By the end of the year Morrissey and Marr will split up the Smiths over an argument about Cilla Black. The real pop charts will be dominated by Stock, Aitken and Waterman, who between 1987 and 1990 have 12 number-one hit singles in the UK and have a penchant for likening themselves to Motown. August 1991 sees the first album release by Blur.

LAWRENCE FROM FELT, Pete Astor from the Weather Prophets, Bobby Gillespie, Alan McGee, Grant McLennan and Robert Forster from the Go Betweens. In their own minds these men are rock royalty (the notion of indie does not yet exist). David Westlake and myself sit at the end of the table awaiting our turn. Nineteen years old. Winter 1987. Pre-gig pints in the Devonshire Arms, Camden Town. Shane MacGowan's manor - he's in the corner. This is pre-money

London Town. When the place was still a shithole. The pubs all close at three in the afternoon for a few hours and there are only four channels on the TV. How did I get here?

Straight from school to art college, where after one year on a foundation course I am thrown out – *asked to leave* as I have ‘a bad attitude to further education’. Not true. I have a great attitude. I blag a place at the London College of Music in Great Marlborough Street – a make-do for those not good enough to get into the Royal College of Music or Guildhall – leave my parents’ home in Portsmouth and head for my first rented room, in Stockwell, south London.¹ Just in time for the first weekend of the 1985 Brixton riots. My housemates, Chad and Ange are manic dole fiends. We get drunk on looted lager from the Sunshine Supermarket on Railton Road. Then, with a little bit of Dutch, we head out and watch the final embers of Brixton burning (Ange Doolittle will have a small bite of fame as lead singer with late-80s band Eat).

I have not yet turned 18. Music college was everything I hoped it wouldn’t be. Like every teenage Velvets nut with a guitar I hold on to the hope that I will meet a John Cale to play opposite my Lou Reed, naturally. Time, time. Running and passing. Got to get something together before I’m 19. November 1986. I answer an advert in *Melody Maker* for the first and only time: ‘Servants singer songwriter seeks musicians’. The songwriter’s name is David Westlake. I obsessively read the weekly music press (there are still four weekly music papers) so I have heard of his band the Servants. He has just sacked them. Westlake and I hit it off, and we’re into the same stuff: the Modern Lovers, *Dragnet* and *Totales Turns* by the Fall. The Only Ones’ first album. *Adventure* by Television. Wire and the Go Betweens. By March ’87 I am in Greenhouse Studios, Islington playing guitar and piano on Westlake’s first solo album, destined to be released on the then fashionable Creation label. By the end of the year the album *Westlake* is out and greeted with

a yawn of indifference by a world far more interested in Ecstasy and the latest incarnation of the Manchester scene.² We, perhaps unwisely, revert to the old band name the Servants.

Lawrence from Felt, Bobby Gillespie, Alan McGee, Grant McLennan, Robert Forster, David Westlake and me. Men convinced of their own genius, though at 19 I am not yet a man, and it is strange to keep on meeting people who are almost ten years older. Pete Astor is the lead singer of the Weather Prophets, a Creation band who had their hour in the sun some six months ago. Pete's got the look and the regulation leathers. Ex-music journalist Pete has also got a theory on all rock 'n' roll lore. Just as well because the one thing he ain't got is the fucking songs. Bobby Gillespie wafts around saying little apart from who looks cool and who doesn't. Strangely people take notice of him. You're just too hip baby.

Tonight the Servants are supporting Lawrence's band Felt at Dingwalls. It is one of Felt's many farewell gigs to an indifferent nation. It will be a few years before Lawrence gets good and delivers his neo-glam masterpiece *Back in Denim*. Tonight, in the Devonshire, he is a classic study of fabulous rock star egotism in a hideous harlequin-motif jacket. Up his own enigma. Lawrence – a rock star in mind only – travels with a small entourage. A lackey is always on hand to light Lawrence's steady flow of cigarettes, as the Felt singer pontificates in a Brummie monotone – to no one in particular – on the possibilities of 'sewing on a fringe'. You see, Lawrence has started to lose his hair and does not have the money for an Elton-style transplant. The somewhat unlikely option of sewing on a fringe has become an obsession. In later years he will, on occasion, sport a hazardous wig. Photo sessions and video shoots will be at the mercy of the wig and its inability to cope with inclement weather. On and on he goes. Another

cigarette is lit. The lackeys are giving Lawrence's fringe predicament some serious consideration.

Unfortunately any suggestions provoke petulant fits from the eccentric genius. I don't want to be complicit in high-maintenance Lawrence mania, so I move over to Grant's table. Grant McLennan of the Go Betweens has become a mentor to David and me, pushing 30 and proud of his elder statesmanship to the assembled Creation mob. Alan McGee loves the Go Betweens; he even names his forgettable mini-Malcolm McClaren scam girl band, Baby Amphetamine, after an Only Ones fanzine that Robert Forster and Grant put together back in their native Brisbane. Thankfully McGee's respect is not reciprocated. Tonight Grant is on form and drinking like giddy up. The Go Betweens fly back to Australia for good the next morning, after a few tough years in unyielding, unforgiving 80s London. Tonight is partly a farewell drink for them. 'It's great to be here tonight with all my favourite English bands who all wanna sound like the Byrds and the Velvet Underground,' muses Grant. 'Y'know, Creation is my third-favourite record label,' he adds with heavy sarcasm, rubbing McGee's face in it.

Alan McGee, anointer of genius and self-styled record mogul. I first met McGee back in the spring of '87, in Fury Murrays, a hellhole of a club behind Glasgow Central station. I am sound-checking my brand new Fender Telecaster. A Fender Telecaster I have scrimped and paid for in saved dole money and starvation. Hard won. If anyone so much as looks at this guitar in the wrong way they will unleash the winds of psychic war. Westlake and I are on the Scottish leg of a tour supporting the Weather Prophets. McGee sidles up to the front of the stage and points at me. 'You. You're Tom Verlaine.' He is of course referring to the buzz-saw blitzkrieg maverick lead guitarist of seminal symbolist New York City art rockers Television. Maybe some people would be happy with this introduction.

Not I. I am a stickler for manners and would have preferred a 'How do you do?' or even a simple 'Hello.' The 80s were plagued by these small-time indie Svengalis, wannabe Brian Epsteins or mini-Malcolms. Forever proclaiming some poor bugger to be a genius. Of course hype is fundamental to pop music. But it often says more about the hyper than the hyped. The start of the cursed holy bestowals.

'You. You're Tom Verlaine,' it says, utterly unbecoming. I fix the fool with a dead-eyed stare. *Say nothing, say nothing.* You, Alan McGee, will pay for this transgression. You will pay.

Back in the Devonshire Arms Grant McLennan turns to me and whispers, loud enough for anyone to hear, 'That Alan McGee, not much going on up top.'³

Westlake, McLennan and I stagger up the road the 200 yards or so to the venue. The old long bar of Dingwalls. Robert Forster is in the shadows. Thirty years old and a lean six foot four. Always conspicuous. Forster has just come out of his Prince phase. His new look is somewhere between *Raw Power*-period Iggy and Sherlock Holmes. With his long hair dyed silver grey – a homage to *Dynasty's* Blake Carrington no less – round wire-frame glasses and tweed cape. This is a bold, potentially tragic look, but Forster carries it off. People just gaze in admiration. David Westlake and I are in awe of the man. Everybody loves Robert Forster, and no one can quite work out why he is not a huge star. He has hit a creative peak, having just written some of the best songs of his career – 'The Clarke Sisters', 'When People Are Dead', 'The House That Jack Keroauc Built'. A few hours earlier, back in the Devonshire, Pete Astor delivered a lecture on why all Robert's new songs are merely 'filler material'. Yeah, yeah, Pete. Whatever you say.

We do the gig. Too drunk to play well, we still – in the rock 'n' roll vernacular – blow Felt off the stage. Everyone talks loudly through Felt's set. Lawrence is playing his

latest epic, 'Primitive Painters'. On and on it goes. Somewhere, fresh paint dries upon a wall. Sadly, I am not there to watch it.

More drinks at the bar with Robert, Grant and Lindy Morrison, the Go Betweens' terrifyingly blunt drummer. 'If you're gonna play Dingwalls you've gotta fucken rock. Lemmy hangs out here with fucken Johnny Thunders. You can't play like a bunch of fucken pussies. You've gotta fucken rock.' She has a point.

Lawrence. Pete Astor. Bobby Gillespie. Alan McGee. Grant McLennan. Robert Forster. David Westlake. Me. All of these men convinced of their own genius. One of these men now sadly dead.⁴

*

Four long years later. October 1991. Four years of recording songs that no one hears. Gigs that no one attends. Photographs that no one sees. Four long years of income support. Restart interview, income support, restart interview, income support, restart interview. Enterprise Allowance scheme, Mrs Thatcher's ingenious new 'arts grant' - David Westlake and I get one each. Four long years and one single, in '89 called 'It's My Turn' (it isn't), and one album - existential art rock, ten years too late and fifteen years too early - called, with unflinching self-knowledge - *Disinterest* (1990). Four long years. Six bass players, three drummers and two uninterested record labels. We have perfected haircuts that no one will look at. We practise quotes for interviews that will never take place. This is of course what all healthy rock 'n' roll 20-year-olds must do. Trouble is I am now 24. David is 26. We have reached the end of our rope. We painstakingly record demos for one more album, provisionally entitled - and again with self-awareness not lacking - *Smalltime*. The demos are great, but the album never gets made. What little luck there was

ran out long ago, and in October '91 the Servants call it a day.

Four long years. Bad habits die hard. In my sloth I've picked up a few. On a dreary Tuesday autumn afternoon I line up three bottles of red wine. Three bullets, each with my name on. Russian roulette with all the chambers loaded. I down the bottles in just over two hours. I could probably do more but I'm wearier than usual. I pass out on the couch. I dream about red. Swathes of crimson red. I am Isadora Duncan, in a red car, on a red road, with a red sky, and a red scarf caught in a red wheel tightening around my neck. My skinny long dancer's neck. I'm thrown out of a feverish sleep by the need to vomit. Blood. Throwing up fucking blood. I am by nature a hypochondriac, but to have an irrational fear of death turn into the actual possibility of dying is quite something. Without too much prompting I see a scornful doctor. A severe eastern European lady of retirement age prods at my sides and back. Tuts and shakes her head. Dispassionately she tells me what I already know. That I most probably have serious liver damage. (Tests confirm this.) All self-inflicted. Give up drinking and smoking. Or die.

¹ I was born in Walton-on-Thames in Surrey on 7 October 1967. My parents moved to Portsmouth when I was 14.

² Mid-'88. David Westlake and I are laughing about the previous evening's debut TV performance by a hopeless new group called the Stone Roses. The show's presenter Anthony H. Wilson is very enthusiastic. The Servants; always a haven for sentient thought.

³ If McGee had really known his onions he would have realised that Tom Verlaine played a Fender Jaguar. It was Richard Lloyd who played the Telecaster.

⁴ On Saturday 6 May 2006 Grant McLennan died in his sleep at his Brisbane home. He is sorely missed.

First blood

November 1991-May 1992. The Auteurs' first demos recorded November/December 1991 as Nirvana's second album Nevermind heads to the top of the charts on both sides of the Atlantic. American rock rules: Soundgarden from Seattle, Smashing Pumpkins and Pavement are loved by all. In March 1992 Melody Maker puts Suede on the front cover before they have a record out, calling them 'The Best New Band In Britain'. Their debut single 'The Drowners', released in May, hits number 49 in the UK singles chart.

IT IS STRANGE to come face to face with your own mortality when barely into your mid-twenties. I spend sober days staring out of the kitchen window watching the overgrown garden creep up on me. John Cale's 1982 semi-improvised howl of drunken pain, *Music for a New Society*, clatters away in the background. It doesn't help. Perhaps if I stay here long enough in my vegetative state the garden will engulf me and bury me alive. I share a large ground-floor flat in far-flung suburban Southgate, north London with Alice. I am convinced this is the flat I shall expire in. Luckily for Alice, she is doing a full-time degree course in film and art history at nearby Middlesex Poly, so she is spared the misery of my morbid unemployed existence. Some people when faced with their own mortality choose to

spend what may be their last days leading a hedonistic debauched lifestyle; others embrace religion and an ascetic existence, atoning for their sins in preparation for the inevitable. Or maybe take care of practical matters. Perhaps arrange the funeral – after all, it won't arrange itself. I choose to write an album. God knows why. Rock 'n' roll hasn't got me anywhere before, unless you count my sorry predicament.

I am a cell of one. Great art must be created in isolation. Hermetically sealed. Art. Black art. Art speaks with fork tongue. Bullshit art. Explain yourself. Are you a savant? Perhaps a cipher? Channelling the voices of dead souls – just like Ian Curtis. A noble savage. Art speaks with fork tongue. I am a cell of one.

Creating art is like building a wall. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise. Writing a great song is like building a wall, or whittling at best. I work in ascetic denial. All I allow myself to listen to is a cassette: *Golden Hour with the Kinks*. *The Original Modern Lovers* is already etched on my brain. Songs come slowly but they do at least come. 'Bailed Out' and 'Don't Trust the Stars' (a poke at the millennial obsession with astrology and mumbo-jumbo) are early front runners, then 'Starstruck'. A breakthrough. A feather-light ballad from the point of view of a washed-up child star.

When you finally crack it, the self-doubt drains away, so I seize my moment and write for all I'm worth. 'Early Years' is a fictional account of those hungry times in the Servants. 'Showgirl' a rags-to-rags glitter fantasy written on a train journey from Guildford to Waterloo. Another faded glamour vignette about a loser marrying an off-off-Broadway actress. There is not a shred of truth in it. Yet it's still a classic.

I quickly learn how to use a four-track tape recorder. With limited resources – a couple of guitars, an out-of-tune upright piano, cardboard boxes for drums, a Pixiephone, finger cymbals and a delay pedal – I make myself work nine

to five each day, while Alice is at college. I find that by recording the piano backwards I can make it sound like a cello. By December I have a demo tape. A demo tape that's murky and wobbly but undeniably magical. Christ, even I'd buy this. I start daydreaming about my primordial stew of stately English ballads, which sounds like a wake for Tyrannosaurus Rex¹ and the Incredible String Band. The songs are well on their way to greatness, even the cardboard boxes thudding away in the soup sound cool. These early recordings are like nothing else currently around.

In a Christmas boozier I stumble into an old school pal. Glenn Collins is that rare thing, a young person who is genuinely eccentric. He buzzes around the pub in a horrible tweed suit and spats, puffing away on a briar pipe. It's a maverick look for sure. Glenn spends his life tinkering with vintage British motorbikes. Motorbikes that will forever remain stationary in his drive. He dreams of being an antique dealer. Almost predictably, he claims to have been caught up in some sort of alien abduction and earns a paltry living as a gardener. A *gardener*. Glenn Collins is as mad as a budgerigar. He is also a drummer, a drummer who has the Howard Kaylan/Mark Volman backing vocals thing off pat. Glenn is a rare breed. For this I like him a lot. A few days later I play him my little demo tape. First track 'Starstruck'. He thinks it's a hit single. He's in. Like I said, mad as a budgie.

*

Early 1992. I'm sitting in a burnt-out flat in Dalston, east London. Dave Barker is the owner of the flat. Thirty-eight years old and a dead ringer for Brian Wilson during the bedbound years. Barker has been given his own imprint on Fire Records. The Servants made a record for Glass, Dave's old label back in '88. Dave Barker is fundamentally a good

guy who loves the records he puts out. He just has great difficulty getting anything done. His fire-damaged flat reeks of smoke. A few months ago Dave fell asleep in his armchair. Fag in hand, turning the one-bedroom purpose-built into an inferno. Dave Barker is a man who is lucky to be alive. His pet cat wasn't so lucky. Incinerated.

'She 'ad bronchitis anyway,' he adds pragmatically.

'I'm not surprised, Dave,' I say, nodding at the overflowing ashtray. Dave's throat and lips combine with a throaty gurgle to make a noise that passes for laughter.

I haven't seen Dave for about a year; now his life seems to have turned into a Tom Waits song.

My mission is twofold. I need to get a gig for my as yet unnamed band. I am also aware that I am still under contract with Fire Records.

When Glass inevitably ran out of money, Barker remortgaged his house in a bid to keep the label going. Dave's indolence meant that injection of money didn't last long, and soon Glass Records tanked. Clive Solomon, who owns Fire, is a notorious figure in the music industry. Clive buys Dave's old label and also offers Dave a job at Fire. Unfortunately when Barker goes to Fire he also takes the Servants with him. When bands get desperate they do dumb things. In 1990 the Servants signed to Fire Records. Forever.

The master plan is to get Dave Barker to release me from the contract. He will feel bad about this and offer me a gig by way of compensation. I am sure Dave will hate my demo. It's the polar opposite of all the third-rate feedback-churning cack that he is so in love with. I walk over to Dave's stereo and put the unnamed tape on. Just to seal the deal I tell Barker that my new band is called Youth Movement. It's a piss-poor name, the worst that I can think of. 'Fuckin' 'ell, that's a fuckin' terrible name,' chokes Dave. Ace in the hole. 'Fuckin' great songs though. Didn't know you 'ad it in you.'

Thanks, Dave. Dave Barker. From Romford, Essex. I leave the flat with a gig, opening for the Television Personalities. I am still under contract. I know that Dave will be too lazy to play the songs to Clive Solomon. I expect I'll be stuck in contractual limbo with Fire Records forever. For now I put it out of my mind. There is, at least, a gig to prepare for. These little matters, such as being signed to an overtly hostile record label, do tend to come back to haunt you.

As a precocious teen I had worked my way through the classics of European cinema. Godard's *Weekend* - yeah, yeah. *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* - sure. *Jules et Jim* - tick. It's amazing how you get ideas above your station when you live in the provinces. Alice is reading up on new wave French cinema as part of her degree. *Cahiers du Cinéma*. Auteur theory. Fuck, how did I miss this stuff? Actually it's deathly dull, but the name jumps out from the page. The Auteurs. It is one of the all-time great band names. Like the Supremes or the Monkees, but for intellectual snobs. It's even a contradiction in terms. Perfect. So the Auteurs it is. I persuade Alice to pick up the bass guitar again - during the last dark days of the Servants she was press-ganged into bass duties and now has a pretty good grasp of the instrument - and Glenn transports our equipment around in a gardening trailer. We rehearse hell for leather.

Early 90s London is full of derivative charmless bands clogging up the live circuit. Everybody seems to be in thrall to the American bands on the ultra hip Sub Pop label, TAD and Mudhoney. Dinosaur Junior are lauded on a weekly basis. Nirvana's instant classic *Nevermind* is everywhere. I am working on a new song called 'American Guitars': part sarcastic riposte to British bands who cannot find their own voice, forever worshipping at the altar of US rock, part self-mythologising history of my fledgling band. Soon the British press will pick up on 'American Guitars',

proclaiming it some sort of battle cry against the marauding Yanks. It won't be long before Britpop rears its ugly head, bobbing about on the perimeters, then brazenly cavorting around on centre stage like an attention-seeking moron.

The Auteurs play their first gig at the Rock Garden in April. Later that month we support the Television Personalities at the Bull and Gate, Kentish Town. Our third gig is at the Euston Rails club in May.

The Euston Rails is a bar/canteen for London Underground employees situated on the forecourt of Euston station. It's great, and I'm in a fine mood for this gig. Throughout the soundcheck the monitor engineer gleefully insults my guitar sound. A good omen. Tonight the Auteurs are shockingly good. The previous two gigs had been tentative, but now we find our sound. After the show a young man approaches me. He babbles some nonsense and then gives me his card:

David Laurie
(wants to be an)
A & R man

One day he will be, but now what a cheeky scamp. Between nervous chortling Laurie tells me I should send a demo to Malcolm Dunbar at East West records, part of Warner Brothers. 'Don't send him one tape; send him ten or fifteen. Make sure he knows who you are.' Chancer. I raise Laurie and send 30 copies of my demo tape to Malcolm Dunbar. I also send a couple of copies to *NME* journalists Steve Lamacq and John Mulvey.

I'm optimistic after my offensive on East West, and I am feeling less deathly after months of temperance. A late-spring sunny afternoon and I come in from the garden of our Southgate flat to answer the telephone.

'Can I speak to Luke Haines please?'