

Uncommon



The old razzle dazzle:
Pulp at Spiritland Studio,
London, February 4, 2025
(from left) Mark Webber,
Jarvis Cocker, Nick Banks,
Candida Doyle.

People

Thirty years since their Glastonbury '95 apotheosis, and 24 since their last album appeared to call time on their recording career, **PULP** have a new album and a new lease of life. An art pop anomaly in thrift store drape, with an original take on the human comedy, they survived obscurity, fame and disillusionment to enjoy arena-filling vindication. Now it's clearer than ever: there's nothing like them and there never will be. "Pulp has always mutated and now it's mutated again," they tell **IAN HARRISON**.

Photography by
TOM JACKSON.



JUNE 24, 1995. TONIGHT, THE GLASTONBURY FESTIVAL WAS to play host to one of the defining bands of the era. Or it would have done, had Stone Roses guitarist John Squire not broken his collarbone while mountain biking outside San Francisco earlier in the month.

Who would step in at the last minute? Primal Scream, Guns N' Roses and Rod Stewart reportedly declined. Instead, taking time out from recording their fifth album, Sheffield's Pulp stepped into the breach. The decision would change their lives forever.

They weren't exactly an unknown quantity. Part of the Britpop boom, they'd scored a UK Number 2 single with *Common People* a few weeks earlier. Even so, it was a gamble. Pulp had been toiling on the furthest margins for years and finally started to accrue notice in the early '90s with

idiosyncratic, charity shop-futurist songs of sex and intrigue. Charismatic singer Jarvis Cocker was given to nervy interpretative dance and tangential asides: would they rise to the occasion on the Saturday night big stage?

"I've never been as nervous in my life as for that concert," says Cocker. "We hadn't played for ages and *Common People* had only just been a hit, but it worked."

The crowd's appreciation of Pulp's pluck built into rapt delight in their relatable songs. Enjoying its public debut, *Sorted For E's & Wizz* addressed the festival drug experience conspiratorially. At the set's climax, tens of thousands lent their voices to *Common People*'s anthemic parable of class, privilege and sex.

"I'd never had people sing along with a song before, certainly not at that volume where I thought, 'They're louder than me,'" says Cocker. "It was the first time I realised we had gone into another area, and that life had changed. It was perfect, one of those unforgettable moments."

Not every member of Pulp, however, was as convinced they'd smashed it. Guitarist Mark Webber remembers wayward violin playing, among other flaws immortalised in the BBC's TV coverage.

"I thought it wasn't a very good concert at the time," he says. "We remixed the live recording of *Common People* as soon as we had the chance, but the BBC never synced the video

with the remixed version, so whenever they repeat it, the balance of the instruments is all out of whack. People loved it, though."

"I watched that on telly at home in Sheffield with my two-year-old daughter asleep on my lap, on a rented TV you had to put 10 pence pieces in," recalls Richard Hawley, an old friend of Pulp's and later, a bandmate. "Jarv made me fucking cry, the bastard. Tears rolling down my cheeks, being so happy that one of us had got away."

Pulp went on-stage as one band and came off another. Within the year, that fifth album, entitled *Different Class*, hit UK Number 1 and later won the Mercury Music Prize. Jarvis Cocker, who'd made a bargain with pop fame as a teenager, was about to get what he'd always wanted.

NEARLY 30 YEARS LATER, ON FEBRUARY 12, 2025, IN the west London offices of the Rough Trade label, Cocker is preparing for his first in-depth interview as Pulp's singer for more than 20 years. Sat beneath several portraits of a younger Jarvis, he's still recognisably himself, with thick-framed specs, double-breasted green check jacket, dark roll-neck and cords. Curiously, he has very long thumbnails. "Be patient with me," he says, in soft and resonant south Yorkshire tones.

There's much to discuss. Since 2023, Pulp – Cocker plus Webber, keyboardist Candida Doyle and drummer Nick Banks – have been playing gigs again, the line-up augmented by players from Cocker's most recent solo vehicle Jarv Is. As he gave away in loose talk with a passing motorist in north-east London last August, the expanded group have been at work on the first new Pulp album since 2001's *We Love Life*. To be released on June 6, *More*, is what many Pulp fans have been waiting for since *Different Class*: a restatement of their founding virtues as a pop group, with age-appropriate but still penetrating narratives, tunes galore and a renewed sense of purpose. The obvious question: why now?

"I'd written this song *Hymn Of The North* which I thought was all right," says Cocker, "so we tried it out in soundchecks and we played it at the Hammersmith Odeon and I dunno, it just felt good... so I thought, Well, let's see how far we can take that."

Other new songs were added to the setlist. A *Sunset*, co-written by Cocker and Hawley, had been baptised in 2022 at a benefit for the Sheffield venue The Leadmill. Background Noise and Slow Jam were among songs played live by Jarv Is. After some rehearsals and song development with the original Pulp members and the expanded ensemble, they went to the Walthamstow studio of producer James Ford in August 2024 to cut lead single *Spike Island* (sample lyric: "I was born/To perform/It's a calling"). Following a break for lyric-writing, they returned in November.

"We were finished in three weeks!" says Cocker. "Quickest ever. We were quite ready." He was pleased, he says, with fantasy girlfriend song *Tina* and its imaginary liaison "screwing in a charity >

"I wanted to be in a band from about seven, because of The Beatles, probably."

JARVIS COCKER

Part of the masterplan: Pulp in 1983 circa the *Everybody's Problem* single (from left) Tim Allcard, Saskia Cocker, Jarvis Cocker.



First time nerve: Pulp in 1993 (from left) Russell Senior, Jarvis Cocker, Steve Mackey, Candida Doyle, Nick Banks.



Top of the class: (from left) Senior, Doyle, Cocker, Mackey and Banks, 1996.



Cocker Conspiracies

Ian Harrison enjoys Pulp's long, strange journey on LP.

IT

★★

(Red Rhino, 1983)



Produced by future Mission guitar hairy Simon Hinkler,

young crooner Cocker's seven-song debut set naïve and sincere ruminations on love to melodious, acoustic soft-pop with flutes, cello and the quietest drums. While not the finished article, *Blue Girls*, *My Lighthouse* and *Wishful Thinking* have charm and ambivalence to echo what the *Marine Girls* were up to at the same time. Incongruous trad jazz caper *Love Love* encapsulates 20-year-old Jarvis's amorous dilemma: "Is it just the idea that I like, or is it for real?"



FREAKS

★★★

(Fire, 1987)

Still not a pop star (indeed, resentful of The Smiths' success), Cocker fast-forwards to curdled jadedness with violinist Russell Senior in harness. The results are clenched and

dark – see *Being Followed Home* and *Anorexic Beauty* – but relief comes with omnipotence/impotence daydream *Master Of The Universe*, the Sweet Jane-adjacent *I Want You* and *They Suffocate At Night*'s love-gone-mouldy vignette. Looking grot and failure in the eye, but yet to fully use them as fuel for genius.

SEPARATIONS

★★★★

(Fire, 1992)



Having escaped to London and raving, Cocker's vision evolves into synth'd-up pop dramas he could really strike poses to. Grandiose mini-epics *Love Is Blind*, *My Legendary Girlfriend* and *Countdown* transmit writhing urgency to a techno pulse, as Cocker achieves gasping hysteria narrating erotic obsessions with wit and bathos. It's do-or-die stuff, and mortality visits the dancefloor twice, as *Death II* finds a disco king *In extremis* losing his mind, and *Death Goes To The Disco* schlager-chugs one last slowie before endless sleep.

INTRO: THE GIFT RECORDINGS

★★★

(Island, 1993)

A stop-gap collection of singles and their B-sides packages a rich seam of prize Pulp as the dam well



and truly broke. Adept at the experimental flipside – see *Space*'s evocation of astral travelling before it kicks into garage-punk raging, and three-song portrait *Inside Susan* – the intensifying, gloriously odd one-two-three of *OU (Gone, Gone)*, *Babies* and *Razzmatazz* showed them as fresh as the morning with every element perfectly aligned. In short, the bold new pop thing, after just 15 years of trying.

HIS 'N' HERS

★★★★

(Island, 1994)

Pulp's first proper album statement may launch itself into grimness and dysfunction – car thieves, the withering of attraction and daytime trysts with



single mothers feature in the first three songs – but it's all in the service of poetic truth and anthemic indie rock. This lyricist, you suspect, resided so long in the underworld that he understands the fault lines between innocence and experience, giving *Do You Remember The First Time?* and *Pink Glove* a particular, haunting charge.



DIFFERENT CLASS

★★★★★

(Island, 1995)

The definitive, all-killer album, as emotion, observation and an encompassing sensibility – after Oasis and Blur, Pulp were Cool Britannia's Third Way – converge. Rooting for the rejected, Jarvis Cocker's droll television persona didn't always show his steel ("I specialise in revenge," went the nerve-tingling *I Spy*) and so it goes on *Different Class*, where love, class, sex, life at its messiest and beyond collide in the most soaring pop, before the closing *Bar Italia* brings bleary resolution, concept album-style. Pulp would never be as carefree again.



THIS IS HARDCORE

★★★★★

(Island, 1998)

In satanic crimson, the consequence of fatal fame in cannibalistic overdrive. While the musical structures reflect bassist Steve Mackey's enthusiasm for sampling, the laughs are bleak as Cocker ponders self-disintegration ("Here comes another panic attack," promises *The Fear*). Still, while we're here we may as well enjoy it, and next to the titanic title song, *Party Hard*'s churning *Nite Flights* homage, the help-me-Jesus *Dishes* and *A Little Soul*'s tale of the father who abandoned him are amongst Cocker's most memorable.

WE LOVE LIFE

★★★

(Island, 2001)



The Scott Walker-produced last gasp of Pulp (for a while) rose like a swamp creature from the muddy banks of the Don. Here, atop acoustic-leaning instrumentation, there are metaphors for growth, reveries of pre-fame Sheffield and reflections on love lost. *The Trees*, *Weeds* and *Bad Cover Version* belonging with Pulp's best, while, prophetically, the self-slugging *Sunrise* ("All my achievements in days of yore/Range from pathetic to piss-poor") predicts their star would rise again.

< shop/On top of black bin bags/Full of donations/The smell of digestive biscuits in the air." He adds he hasn't set foot in a charity shop for a decade.

Although *More*'s players include Jarvis collaborators Emma Smith on violin and bassist Andrew McKinney, the core of Cocker, Banks, Doyle and Webber impart an undeniable Pulpness. "You're working with people that you've known for most of your life," says Cocker. "We have our abilities and inabilities, our quirks, and in the end, it's that combination that make it something with a personality. Once those things are happening, it starts to sound like Pulp."

How do Pulp's hardcore view the influx from Jarvis Is?

"They're much better musicians than we are," says Webber. "I'm not sure what to call them – at the photo shoot they were talking about us being 'the four principals'. If it was all Jarvis, he wouldn't be begging us to come back and help him, would he? Ha ha!"

Banks admits to "eye rolling" when the idea of recording came up.

"Candida said, 'Jarvis is going to create and write songs no matter what we do. So we might as well be involved, and therefore it will be a Pulp record,'" he recalls. "Pulp has always mutated and now it's mutated again. I still don't know really why Pulp are doing a record in 2025, but we have! As I always say, if you do nothing, nothing happens. If you do something, something happens. And, y'know, as is written on the side of my cousin's camper van, *One Last Adventure Before Dementia*."

One missing member of Pulp's classic line-up is bassist and Cocker's close creative foil Steve Mackey, who died after suffering three AVM brain bleeds on March 2, 2023. "I hope Steve would be pleasantly surprised that we've managed to do it," says Cocker. "I'm sure that him not being around had a lot to do with the record. It was a spur in some ways. When somebody important to you passes away, you can't help but think about your own mortality and the fact that, if you are still alive, you have still got the ability to create things."

CREATING THINGS WAS WHAT SUSTAINED COCKER for many years. Born on September 19, 1963, and raised in the Sheffield suburb of Intake, the young Jarvis was bewitched by pop music at an early age.

"I wanted to be in a band from about seven," he says, "because of The Beatles, probably. It encouraged a lot of people in normal circumstances to think they could do something – the working class is visible and producing something that's loads better than the supposed taste-makers. Their influence is incalculable, really. In my mind, it was like The Beatles broke up and my dad left us [his father Mac abandoned the family and moved to Australia] on the same day in 1970."

Living with his bohemian mother Christine and sister Saskia, with his grandparents residing next door, the shy kid who nearly died of meningitis aged 5 learned early that humour could dissipate any awkwardness he felt. He was "14-ish" when he wrote 'The Pulp Master Plan' in an exercise book. "The group shall work its way into the public eye by producing fairly conventional, yet slightly off-beat, pop songs," it promised. Initially known as Arabicus Pulp, Pulp's first official gig was at Sheffield's City School in March 1980. "It was a way of being sociable and having some mates," he says.

For years they existed as an

intense hobby, playing poorly attended gigs with much on-stage chat. Venues included the Hallamshire Hotel pub and Sheffield's Wimpy Bar, where Pulp were paid in burgers. Incredibly, in November 1981 the fledgling group bagged themselves a John Peel session after handing the late Radio 1 DJ a cassette. Cocker duly deferred going to university in order to become a pop star. Maintaining a stable line-up proved a challenge, though: early guitarist Pete Dalton's father threw a cooked dinner at him when he suggested foregoing further education to pursue stardom with Pulp.

With help from manager Tony Perrin, April 1983 would see the first Pulp album released. Produced by future Mission guitarist Simon Hinkler, it presented acoustic Leonard Cohen moves and a callow youth's songs of love: neither it or chugging follow-up singles *My Lighthouse* and *Everybody's Problem* – reputedly inspired by Wham! – would ignite.

Just as Pulp were on the brink of oblivion, enter guitarist/violinist/zine maker and fan Russell Senior. Something of a disciplinarian with an interest in the communist Eastern Bloc and drama, he was fresh from completing a Business Administration degree in Bath. "Russell really saved Pulp, in a way," says Cocker. "I couldn't defer my place to read English at Liverpool University any more, and I had a last-gasp rehearsal with him which seemed like it was good. He thought it shouldn't just be about music, that we should make it an artistic happening. So we carried on doing it."

Doing it, sometimes vaguely. Gigs went ahead as the Jarvis Cocker Experience and the Wicker Players, who performed Dadaist play *The Fruits Of Passion* in various pubs, with one performance involving drummer Magnus Doyle unsuccessfully attempting on-stage coitus with an orange.

The wider world was unaware, but on home turf Cocker's legend was growing. One fan of *It* was Richard Hawley: "It blew my mind – it was like White Horses by Jackie or Bacharach and David's *Trains And Boats And Planes*, but in a modern setting." Live, Cocker's quirky disco moves – beckoning, conjuring, quizzical – were in place even then, he says.

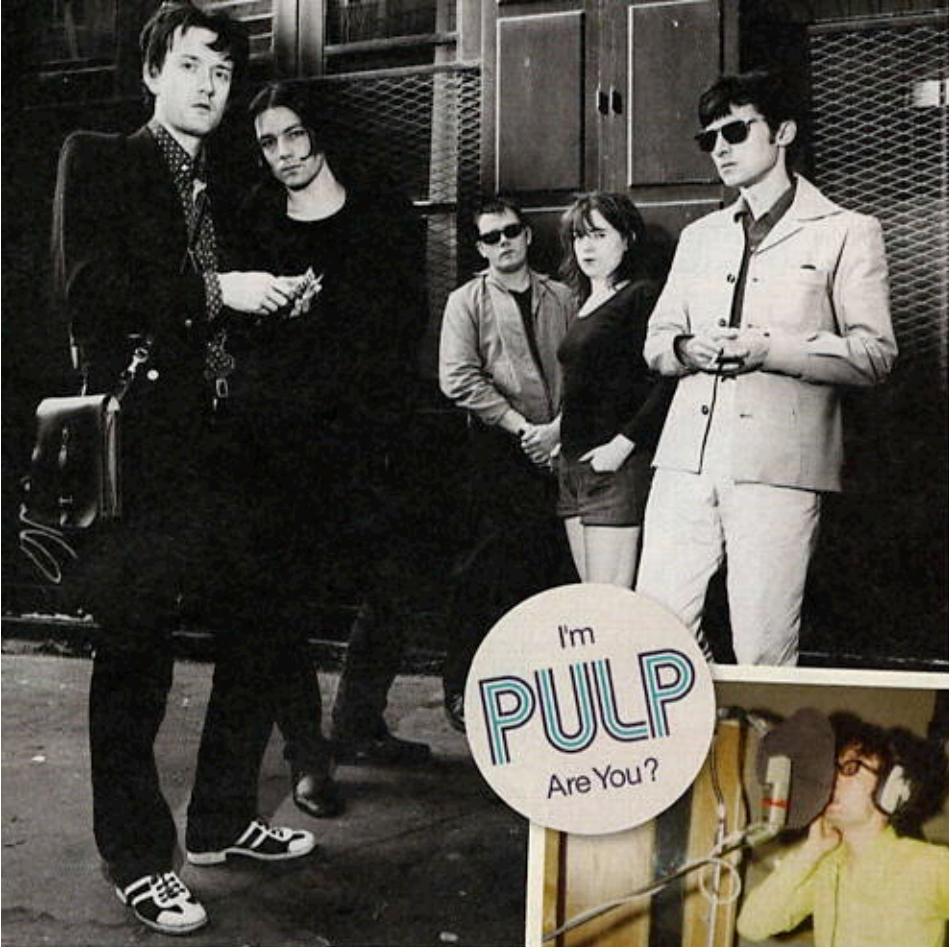
"It was quite a confrontational thing, because no one really moved around stages then," says Hawley. "That thing with his hands was a bit like Dave Berry and Joe Cocker, who did it because he used to be a drummer and didn't know what else to do. I always thought Jarvis was a modern, slightly bastardised version of that, plus a bit of Ian Curtis and a lot of flamboyant 1970s TV stars like Shirley Bassey. He just stood out so massively from everyone >

"Pulp looked like the strangest gang, a cross between the Bloomsbury Set and the cast of *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*."

RICHARD HAWLEY



Freaks scene: (left) Pulp, 1987 (clockwise from left) Cocker, Banks, Steven Mackey, Doyle, Senior; (right) Cocker hits the toilet circuit at Bristol Thekla, 1985.



Steel city smarts: (clockwise from above) Cocker, Mackey, Banks, Doyle and Senior in Paris, 1995; Cocker in session at BBC's Maida Vale Studios for the Mark Goodier show, May 30, 1992; a wheelchair-bound Cocker keeps the show on the road, Bradford Queen's Hall, January 15, 1986; an incognito Russell Senior and Candida Doyle at Pulp's 'The Day It Never Happened' farewell show, Sheffield Leadmill, August 8, 1988; (bottom) say knickers to Pulp.

else. And whatever line-up it was, Pulp looked like the strangest gang, a cross between the Bloomsbury Set and the cast of *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*."

Members came and went. Keyboardist Candida Doyle, sister of Magnus, joined in October 1984. "I liked them straight away," she says today. "I knew the band anyway, because in Sheffield, if you were a bit unusual, you all kind of went to the same clubs."

Doyle had her own need for imaginative escape: aged 16 she had been diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis. "It was kind of, do or die," she says. "And I *did*. I fought it. They said, you know, I could be in a wheelchair in my thirties and in my head, I was instantly like, No, I'm not having this. So I just went about living my life without a care. I was constantly uncomfortable, and my body was sore, but I still went to nightclubs and stayed up 'til 2am."

PULP BATTLED ON. IN NOVEMBER 1985 Cocker fell out of the window of Senior's Division Street flat, above pornographic magazine shop Sven Books, while trying to impress a girl with his Spider-Man impression. After a spell in hospital, he resumed live performance using a wheelchair.

"It was very intriguing, Jarvis in the wheelchair," confirms superfan and eventual Pulp guitarist Mark Webber, dryly. "They were just such a bunch of oddballs, with Russell singing *The Will To Power*" — a clangorous anthem



Northern exposure: Cocker points the way at Clickimin Centre, Lerwick, Shetland, August 13, 1996.



dedicated to Nelson Mandela and miners' union leader Arthur Scargill. "I just hung around, until I was given some tasks to do. They played at the Co-Operative Funeral Parlour function room in Chesterfield and there were about six people there. A particular nadir in that era was in Derby. We spent hours putting tin foil on-stage and basically no one turned up."

By now Pulp had signed to Fire Records, but their *Little Girl With Blue Eyes* (And Other Pieces) EP didn't make the UK Top 40. In summer 1986 Pulp recorded second LP *Freaks* (subtitle: *Ten Stories About Power, Claustrophobia, Suffocation And Holding Hands*) with a budget of £600. An altogether gloomier and more serious prospect, its release in May '87 provoked familiar indifference.

"I kept quiet about being in Pulp," admits Doyle, who was training to be a nursery nurse. "I'd see posters for Pulp concerts, and think, Oh my God. The people I worked with thought I was pretty weird anyway. I mean, it was very rare for a woman to be in a band in Sheffield. That's partly why I stayed. I thought, I've got to stay in because there's hardly any women doing it."

Living back at his mother's, the walls closing in, Cocker took stock. He realised that something had to give. Before he moved to London to study film and video at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, Pulp played a fare-



Balls-up: (clockwise from left) Jarvis and Damon Albarn do Pulp vs Blur, 1995; Cocker and 'The Stone Roses' (actually NME hacks) at Glastonbury 1995; Cocker gets comfy with Jo Brand, 1994; Michael Jackson at the fateful 1996 Brits; Jarvis after his court appearance, 1996.



"I kept quiet about being in Pulp. The people I worked with thought I was pretty weird anyway."
CANDIDA DOYLE

well of sorts at the Leadmill on August 8, 1988. It was entitled *The Day That Never Happened*.

"We were trying to do a multimedia thing," says drummer Banks, another rabid Pulp fan who'd joined in late '86. "But it was done on a dole money budget and it all kind of went wrong. The house projector had broken down so we had a little portable telly on-stage to show 'the visuals'. There was a washing-up bowl full of dry ice – hardly *Top Of The Pops*. There was confetti which was meant to look like a snowstorm, but it all fell down in one go, with a thump. Mark and his mate were trying to blow it around with hairdryers. It was kind of hilarious and extremely stressful at the same time."

On bass was 16-year-old Antony Genn, brother of Cocker's pal Steve. "It was the worst gig of all time," he says. "A disaster. As for a farewell gig, a farewell to what? Farewell to a handful of people that know you in your home town? We all knew Pulp were good and Jarvis was a star, but at that point, Pulp weren't anything."

Genn, who was financing himself via paid-for medical trials and sperm bank donations, had been taking "massive amounts" of LSD, and went off to join a religious cult. Cocker headed to London, with Pulp's status uncertain. In the next two years, they played two concerts.

"IT WAS GOOD TO COME TO LONDON," SAYS Cocker. "I wasn't thinking about Pulp all the time, like it was my only chance, which made it too intense for people. So when I did it again, I did it in maybe a more open-hearted way, which allowed people in, so they could enjoy it. You're never gonna forget where you were brought up, because it forms you, but it's good to realise that there are other ways of living."

In 1989 London, this meant Cocker and sharp, motivated new bassist Mackey – late of Trolley Dog Shag – immersing in the in-

clusive demi-monde of acid house. Its minimalistic soundtrack of repetitive beats, best enjoyed on dance drugs, caused a revolution in music and informed Pulp too.

Claustrophobic and doom-laden, the self-explanatory *This House Is Condemned* appeared on an album recorded in the latter part of 1989. Recorded at Sheffield's Fon studios, *Separations* also featured synth'd-up art rock dramas which offered a first glimpse of the Pulp to come. Typically, Fire didn't release it until 1992. 1991's single *My Legendary Girlfriend*, however, was seen that June on Pulp's first nationwide television appearance, on ITV's middle-of-the-night broadcast *The New Sessions*.

Coverage in the music weeklies, and gigs, became more regular. A move to Gift Records, indie rock subsidiary of the Warp label, entailed a triple punch of ace 45s from mid-'92. The first was *OU (Gone Gone)*, whose press release promised "catchy, non-toxic, lovable, radiophonic, man-made, life-enhancing, unusually melodic, slightly flared, well-groomed, ripe, pert, moist, fully-lined, up to the minute, figure-hugging, music containing no shards of crystalline guitar whatsoever – available in two formats." Grunge, still a force, it was not.

The second Gift single was *Babies*, whose narrator hides in a wardrobe to eavesdrop on a girl and her gentleman visitors. It was also a mini-epic of pop perfection. "It was one of the main reasons they became a different band," says Genn, who at Glastonbury 1995 found acclaim dancing naked on-stage with *Elastica*. "Nick Banks played two chords on guitar – E and D major seventh – which completely and utterly transformed Pulp. Jarvis heard them, ran with the ball and wrote *Babies*."

After a third Gift single, *Razzmatazz*, Pulp succumbed to the major label feeding frenzy laying the ground for Britpop, and in July 1993 signed to Island. After years of straining, success was in the air. One of Banks' outstanding memories is getting a van with real seats when they played their first national UK tour supporting Saint Etienne in 1993. No more sitting on amps in the back. ➤

No squares allowed: Russell Senior and (below) Steve Mackey with Jarvis Cocker during Pulp's performance on the NME Stage, Glastonbury, June 26, 1994.



Separations

Two key Pulp People who've missed out on this reunion, by Ian Harrison

RUSSELL SENIOR

Violin, guitar, fruit teas, 1983-97; 2011

"I've not spoken to Russell for a long time," says Cocker of former guitarist, violinist and ideas man Russell Senior, who left Pulp at the height of their fame in 1997, and again in 2011. "Hopefully, the next time I go to Sheffield, I'll try that. He was a very interesting guy, you know. He'd do things like throw all his change into the river to appease water spirits – things like that."

An essential element from 1983, the stern-gazed Senior was a capable organiser with political awareness and an uncompromising artistic aesthetic. "He was never backwards in coming forward and saying, 'That's shit,'" recalls Banks. "You had that frisson of confrontation that maybe a band needs, and the punk attitude of, 'Get it roughly there and play something interesting.'"

Not bewitched by the shift to *This Is Hardcore*, after his departure he worked with groups including Venini, Baby Birkin and The Long Blondes.

"A thing Russell found difficult was, we suddenly had money and we were still playing *Common People*," reckons Candida Doyle. She adds, "I think Jarvis was wanting to repair the previous break-up" when Senior briefly returned to Pulp in 2011. His 2015 memoir *Freak Out The Squares* presents, very much, his own perspective on Pulp, not to all of his bandmates' delight. "He was very mean about

me," says Webber, "and it was really unnecessary."

Yet still he remains a crucial figure, in ways major and small. "The most Britpoppy we ever got?" wonders Banks. "That was when Russell put on some Union Jack socks for a bit."

STEVE MACKEY

Bass, samples, cigarette-behind-ear, 1989-2013

"Steve was such a big mover of Pulp in those halcyon days," says Nick Banks of late Pulp bassist Steve Mackey, who died on March 2, 2023. "As a foil for Jarvis, moving the band into new ground... there'll always be a Steve-shaped hole in the Pulp universe."

Born in Manchester in 1966, Mackey joined Pulp in 1989. A creative, motivated addition to the group who always looked striking in photographs, he took an increasing role in Pulp's last two albums. After the group's seeming demise, he served as producer, writer and remixer for Marianne Faithfull, Arcade Fire, Serafina Steer and Florence + The Machine, as well as the solo Jarvis. He also designed sound installations for MOMA and the Louvre, and worked as a photographer and video director.

Reuniting with Pulp in 2011, Richard Hawley recalled them sharing a significant look at the tour's last UK gig at Sheffield's Motorpoint Arena in 2012.

"[*Different Class* track] Something Changed was the last song in the set, the last song I thought we were ever going to play together," he says. "I had to turn my back on the audience with fucking tears streaming down my face, and I remember Steve looking across and he started too."

"Losing Steve was just such a fucking broadside," says Hawley. "He was my oldest friend. For [Pulp] to carry on and actually sort of galvanise themselves is fucking great."



"A new level has been unlocked," he says. "You've gone from a band playing to the 'semicircle of indifference' – blokes with their arms folded – to people going crackers and jumping around. We had something that Saint Etienne couldn't compete against. It was the first time a lot of people would have seen Jarvis doing his Funky Chicken dance and his way of connecting with an audience by saying funny and interesting stuff between songs."

In 1993, more and more records were drawing on retro British tropes, Blur's *Modern Life Is Rubbish*, Denim's *Back In Denim* and Suede's self-titled debut among them. When Oasis madness began in the middle of 1994, the Britpop moment had truly arrived.

"The start of it was good," says Jarvis. "People in indie bands were getting into the real chart and it seemed like, Oh yes, we're going to take over. As with most things, it doesn't work out and the idealism doesn't last."

Not that they had much time to reflect. In April 1994 they released fourth LP *His 'N' Hers* and bagged their first proper UK singles chart entry with *Do You Remember The First Time?*, in with a bullet at Number 33. It was not the first Pulp song to concern itself with sex, as underwear, voyeurism, urges, kinks, pregnancy and more had revealed themselves in *Babies*, *Pink Glove* and others.

"I'd taken a lot of my ideas about sex or relationships from songs," says Cocker today. "I found out the reality was very different. So it became my mission statement to try and write about it in a way that I thought was more realistic... I spoke to David Attenborough once, and he said, basically, all animal calls are just mating calls, asking for someone to have sex with. So I'm just carrying on a tradition there. It's a difficult thing, because in my normal life, I'm not going around... I'm not a sex pest, OK?"

PULP REPORTED FOR THE ROAD, WITH TOURS OF Britain, Europe, the US and back. Inevitably, a follow-up LP was needed immediately. Recorded with *Never Mind The Bollocks* producer Chris Thomas in the first half of 1995, *Different Class* remains Pulp's defining statement. As majestic as *Common People* was, the rest measured up. Another Number 2 hit was September '95's double-A side *Sorted For E's & Wizz/Mis-Shapes* – the latter a long-gestating retort to the nightclub bullies and student-haters who'd hunted down Cocker and his like in Sheffield. In the video he homage'd 1963 film *Billy Liar*, with the imaginary machine-gunning of a bad sort played, oddly, by himself.

If things had started to hot up, they were soon to boil over. At the February 1996 Brit Awards, Pulp's singer invaded the stage during Michael Jackson's messianic performance of his hit *Earth Song*.

While the Jackson organisation accused Cocker of endangering on-stage child actors, YouTube viewings reveal no such thing. Cocker runs on, gives a questioning look, waggles his behind and lifts his jacket before exiting, pursued by security. While the rest of Pulp partied on free Brits booze, he spent the night in the cells, with legal representation by comedian and solicitor Bob Mortimer. The *Daily Mirror* organised a Justice For Jarvis campaign, with T-shirts.

Candida Doyle says Cocker had seen the *King Of Pop*'s rehearsal the day before and declared it "awful". On the night, Jackson's act prompted more consternation on Pulp's table. "I don't know if I said to Jarvis, Well, do something," says Doyle.

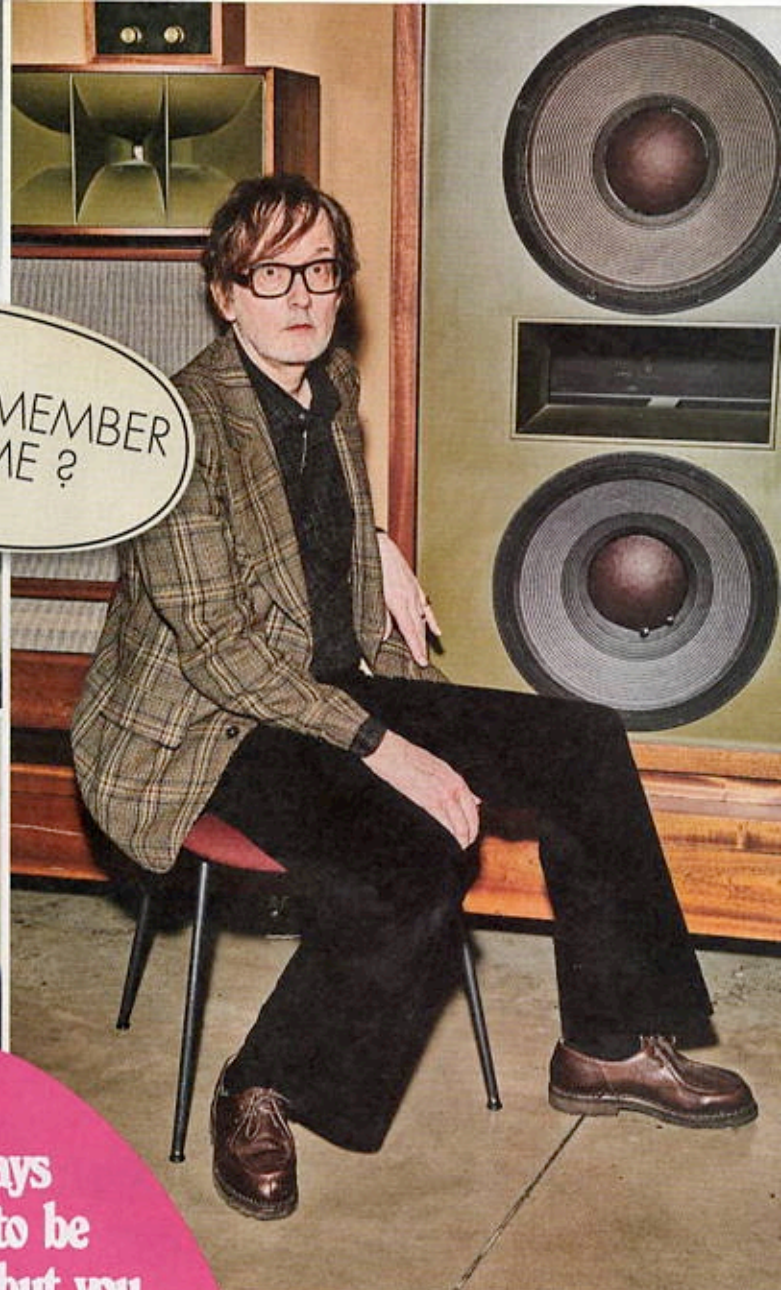
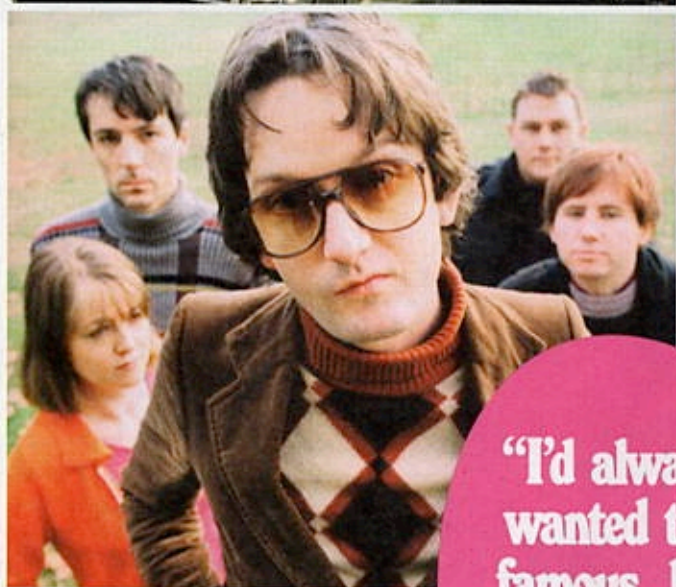
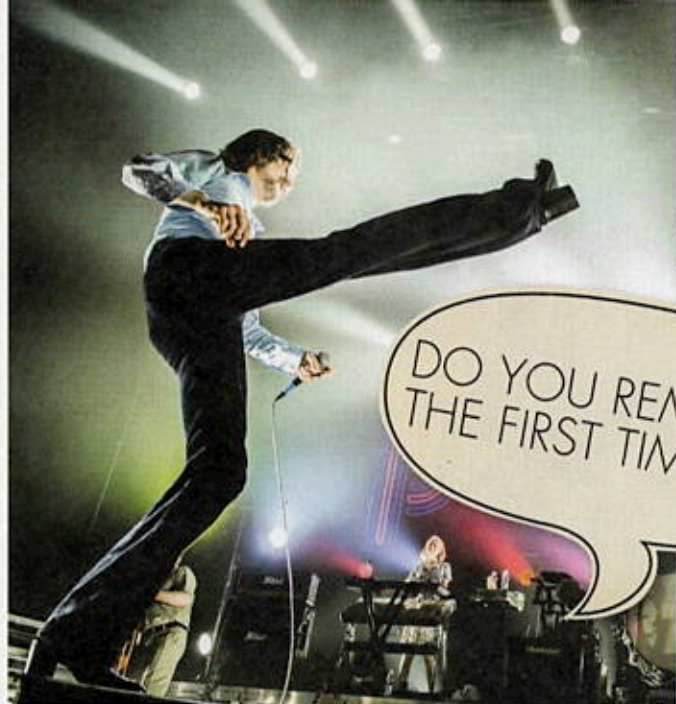
"I didn't see Jarvis again that night," she continues, admitting feelings of guilt for perhaps encouraging his intervention. "I think the next day we started an arena tour, and I said sorry. We've never spoken about it since. It feels a bit taboo."

Though no charges were brought, it was the event, says Cocker, that "sent it all into weirdness".

"At first it looked bad: they accused me of clobbering kids off-stage and stuff, and a bare bottom as well, which wasn't true. After that, everybody knew who I was. I'd always wanted to be famous, but you can't decide on the level of fame that you're going to get. It wasn't for music, it was for one quite out-of-character thing I'd done... That's when it became really difficult to handle, because I just couldn't go out any more. So, yeah, life became dark."

The nation was with you, says MOJO.

"That was nice of them," he says. "But it sent me into a space



"I'd always wanted to be famous, but you can't decide on the level of fame that you're going to get. So, yeah, life became dark."
JARVIS COCKER

that took me a long time to get out of, over 10 years for sure. But I did it, so I can't complain."

Around this time, perhaps forgivably for someone who'd spent so long on the outside, he'd been stuck on a lubricious bouncy castle of people, places and parties. Media reports portrayed a litany of minor celebrity encounters. There were chemical indulgences and a News Of The World tell-all about a romantic indiscretion (at 2011's *T In The Park*, Cocker pretended to wipe his bum with the paper's final edition). "Well, cocaine was the drug of Britpop and it's a horrible drug for people's personalities," he says wearily. "And it didn't have a good effect on mine either."

The December 1996 *GQ* magazine, with a fat Union Jack in the logo, was a 'Cool Britannia' issue, with Cocker on the cover photographed by Terence Donovan, who hanged himself that November. Cocker didn't look quite right behind the eyes and today calls it "the nadir". That month his waxwork was unveiled at the Rock Circus attraction in Piccadilly, just as he went to New York on his own for Christmas and had a breakdown.

PULP PLAYED ONE GIG IN 1997, A LA MONTE YOUNG benefit, and released one single: *Help The Aged*. Senior had left, writing in his 2015 memoir *Freak Out The Squares*, "I knew there was no more juice and the well had run dry."

Freshly squeezed: (clockwise from left) Pulp, now minus Senior, in 1997 (from left) Candida Doyle, Steve Mackey, Jarvis Cocker, Nick Banks, Mark Webber; Jarvis kicks out during the first Pulp reunion at Festival Les Inrocks, L'Olympia, Paris, November 13, 2012; Cocker anticipates receiving some feedback on the first new Pulp album in over 20 years, Spiritland Studio, London, February 4, 2025.

Since November 1996, Pulp had been wrestling with their sixth album *This Is Hardcore*. "It took such a long time to do it," winces Cocker. "I was trying to hide from the world and saw the studio as a safe place to be. It cost a hell of a lot of money."

Banks recalls "eight months in a subterranean set of rooms covered in grey carpet, with no windows and the smell of wet mattresses. Not conducive to making the life-affirming tunes that we'd been doing before. Up to that point, a lot of what Jarvis was writing about was observing the minutiae of ordinary lives. The Michael Jackson thing flipped that, and he became the observed. It was pretty grim at times."

When *This Is Hardcore* came out in April 1998, Radiohead had already shifted the paradigm with *OK Computer*, Blur were looking to America and Oasis were in their maximalist *Be Here Now* phase. Epic in its cinematic horrorscape, *This Is Hardcore*'s title track equated fame with a kind of pornography, and came with an extraordinary and expensive video: it peaked at Number 12 in the UK singles chart. Its often bleak, troubled parent album, which ➤

Some things change:
the 2025 model Pulp
(from left) Nick Banks,
Candida Doyle, Jarvis
Cocker, Mark Webber.



**"There's
always been
tension, but being in
Pulp this time is the
most enjoyable it's
ever been."**

CANDIDA DOYLE



none of the band seem completely happy with, reached Number 1 but didn't hang around. The front cover depicted a young model – who according to some sources is Ksenia Sobchak, who ran in Russia's 2018 Presidential elections against Vladimir Putin – in an unreal, sexualised pose.

"You'd think I would have strongly opposed it," says Doyle. "I think by that time, I wasn't particularly opposing things, I was just getting through it. I suppose I turned a bit of blind eye. Nowadays, you probably wouldn't do that."

Getting his head together in east London after *This Is Hardcore*, Cocker reports that the way forward was signposted by a blackbird building a nest under his windowsill. Watching tiny baby birds grow, he says, made him resolve to "get into nature. So a bit heavy-handedly maybe, I tried to do that, and that's what *We Love Life* was about."

Sessions for Pulp's seventh (and for many years, presumed final) album yielded a "motherlode of unreleased material", says Webber, some recorded with Chris Thomas, that the group abandoned when one of Cocker's musical heroes, Scott Walker, entered the frame as producer. More acoustic in sound and concerned with growth, seasons, meaning and endings, *We Love Life* entered the UK albums chart at Number 6 in October 2001. Within a month it was history. "Scott was an amazing person," says Cocker, "and it was great to do it with him. But then it came out, like, just after 9/11... It's not a bad record but we kind of fizzled out."

The next year Pulp played a tour of UK forests, before going home to die at a gig in Sheffield in December. That month, the *Hits* singles comp, augmented with new song Last Day Of The Miners' Strike, limped to a disappointing UK Number 71. Webber tells MOJO that he didn't listen to music at all for eight years.

COCKER WAS NOT IDLE, AND DURING THE NEXT decade formed mid-life crisis electro band Relaxed Muscle, recorded two solo albums and appeared in the Harry Potter

And *The Goblet Of Fire* film, among other activities. In 2011, Pulp reconvened for well-received gigs, keeping a strict no-interviews rule which was broken when Webber humorously told *The Times* he hoped the band didn't murder their own songs.

They came back for another go in 2023, the live experience now enhanced by a string section, an on-stage staircase to pose up and down and fancy screen visuals. "It wasn't something I was wanting consciously to do, but I said yes right away," says Doyle, who had retrained as a counsellor. "There's always been an amount of tension, but being in Pulp this time is the most enjoyable it's ever been."

Today, it seems Jarvis Cocker has achieved a kind of balance with the life's work that began in Intake 47-odd years ago. He says being an attentive father to Albert, guitarist in indie rockers Spanish Horses, healed the psychic scars of fame. His wife introducing him to Buddhism and meditation also helped. "Pop performers do have ego," he quips.

Meanwhile, music keeps calling him back.

"I've attempted to retire many times," he says.

"It didn't last. Music is kind of a magical thing, you know. When I sing those old songs, when you manage to inhabit the song again, it unlocks it. Some people might say it's nostalgia, but it seems more potent to me. You're tapping back into the energy of what you felt, and it comes back to life. And Pulp... I don't expect it to cure me, or anything, now. I think that makes it a much more pleasurable thing all around. I'm just happy that we managed to make a record that moves me."

He prepares to depart, donning a big coat and a baseball cap reading 'BOSS'. MOJO wonders, can he envisage making another Pulp record now?

"Well, it's *More*," he says. "It wasn't conceived as, Right, this is our grand full stop. But it might be. Or it might be more of a comma – a grand comma." He gives a magician's smile. "Because y'know, nothing ever really ends."

More, by Pulp will be released on Rough Trade Records on June 6.

The band tour the UK in June. Turn to the Crossword on page 113 to win Mark Webber's book *I'm With Pulp, Are You?*