

PETER BUCK

The REM guitarist has fun explaining the air-rage incident, inter-band resentment and just why "purse-mouthed snot-nose" George Bush should be working at McDonald's

INTERVIEW by ANDREW MUELLER

For all that he has spent a quarter of a century playing guitar in one of the world's biggest rock'n'roll bands, Peter Buck claims that he rarely gets recognised – he only ever really felt famous, he says today, following the 2001 contretemps with cabin crew aboard a UK-bound aircraft, which resulted in a trial and eventual acquittal. Although Buck, now 51, appears to inhabit the role of elder rock'n'roll statesman comfortably – long hair greying at the temples, loud shirt wrapped in a respectable suit – his conversation is that of an unreconstructed fan, much happier, and almost unstopably talkative, when discussing music other than his own, though there's plenty of that to discuss. Aside from his day job in REM, Buck moonlights with The Minus 5, instrumental Seattle supergroup Tuatura, and Robyn Hitchcock & The Venus 3.

Buck fields questions from *Uncut's* readers the night after playing at London's the Royal Albert Hall. "I always read this bit," he enthuses. "This'll be fun." He is, at this point, unaware of some hostility brewing in Estonia...

STAR QUESTION



Do you have any special memories from the recording of *Out Of Time* and *Automatic For The People* at Bearsville Studios, Woodstock? We live very close

to the studio, which is now sadly completely dismantled.

Grasshopper, Mercury Rev

That studio was like a magic fairyland. I'm a city guy, and this place is in the woods. We stayed in 'three bears' kind of cottages, whose door frames were 5ft 10in, so I was always walking around with a red bruise on my forehead. So much great music had been made there, it was inspiring. Sally Grossman ran it – Bob Dylan's manager's wife – and one day she wore a leopardskin pill-box hat, and I asked, "Is that the pill-box hat?" and she said: "I think it is."

STAR QUESTION



Gore Vidal has asked you to put together a dinner party. Who would you invite, outside your circle of friends, dead or alive?

Michael Stipe, REM

The reason Michael has said Gore Vidal is because I really like Gore Vidal. When we were doing *Up* in San Francisco, I was sitting in the hotel bar and I could hear this gentleman speaking in a very cultured voice. I looked around the corner and it was Gore Vidal. I was wearing a leather jacket and leather trousers and I said, "Mr Vidal, I just re-read all your essays and histories, and they're great," and he said, "Thanks very much." And we looked at each other and I said, "And you're a great American." He saluted, then walked away. I don't know what that meant. Anyway, he seems like someone who would like a dinner party that ended in a fight, so you'd want Thomas Paine, Karl Marx, and... Charlie Chaplin. I think the three of them together would be interesting. And Gore Vidal himself. My guess is that they'd all be scathing and mean to each other.

Given your position as a former record store employee, what's your position on independent shops becoming extinct?

Scott Stalcup, Indiana

I live in Seattle, where there's a good scene of independent stores. I'm not one of those guys who gets on a computer and surfs. It's nice to go into a store on a Tuesday, which is release day, and ask what's any good. When I worked in a store in Atlanta, it was a mainstream store, but I always made sure I had Miles Davis in catalogue, so when people came in and said, "I want that Chuck Mangione record," I could say, "Nothing against Chuck, but *Kind Of Blue* is better, and it's two dollars less. I guarantee if you buy it you'll like it." Kids would come in for dodgy metal and I'd sell them something by Cheap Trick.

The end of *Automatic For The People* features three of my favourite REM songs ("Man On The Moon", "Nightswimming", "Find The River"). What's your favourite ending to an album?

Sean Finney, Southampton

It's gotta be "Caroline No", into the train and the dogs barking at the end of *Pet Sounds*. I know that's such an obvious answer, but living in America, trains mean something different than they do here – they're long-distance, romantic. That's such a heartbreaking album, and such a heartbreaking song, and then you hear the train and you're back in that Jack Kerouac America. There can't be a better way to end a record.

Your last two LPs have been shadows of past REM – have you lost your musical religion?

Tanel Tabur, Karksi-Nuia, Estonia

Reveal is a good record. Anyone whose records you listen to for a long time makes bad records. You'd think it'd be hard for Dylan to make a bad record, but he's done it. I want to make great records. I want to be in a great band. The pleasure of doing it is a wonderful thing, but it's overwhelmed for me by the sense that I could leave a legacy of amazing work that means something. And when you've done that, you want to do it again. You don't want to end on the worst one and peter out into irrelevance.

Did you ever hear The Fatima Mansions' version of "Shiny Happy People"? What's your favourite cover of an REM song?

Jane Turner, Dublin

I did, because I was a fan of that band. It wasn't a version. They just sampled Michael on one line, and then – I think out of fear that we'd sue them – gave us the publishing. At the time, someone told me about it, and on one hand I thought, "Wow!" because I really like Cathal Coughlan's work, but on the other hand thought, "Why would anyone want to cover that song?" I thought it was cool, though. Other than that, The Fleshtones did "Wind Out" on a live record, that was good. There's a great legitimate bootleg of The Butthole Surfers doing "The One I Love". I saw them do it in Athens. I think it was the only time they did it. **CONTINUES OVER»**