

Whether you're aware of it or not, you'll know Dave Davies' work. As the lead guitarist and one of the key songwriters of The Kinks, he is responsible for some of the most memorable guitar riffs of the '60s, most famously, the overdrive-laden opening salvo of You Really Got Me. Indeed, the guitarist was one of the early pioneers of guitar distortion when, in slashing a hole through his amp in frustration, he unwittingly discovered a totally new sound. An accomplished solo artist, he has been working and touring since The Kinks disbanded in 1996. He successfully recovered from a stroke at the BBC in 2004 and has released several albums since. Festival Baby's Ronan sat down for a chat with him about his upcoming live album, his European tour, ageing, Arsenal and the important role meditation plays in his life.

When I pick up the phone at 17:32 to ring Dave Davies in Los Angeles, I reckon the two minutes past the allotted interview time I've been given won't be a problem; and it's not. Not with the artist at least, and not with his very friendly assistant and partner, Rebecca, who picks up the cell phone after a few moments. She politely asks me to ring the landline, which I duly do. However, something goes awry and for about fifteen minutes there's much toing and froing as we try to figure out the problems. Eventually we settle on a different cellphone number. Mr Davies picks up the phone, sounding cheery. The line is having none of it, though, and duly cuts out. At this point, I start to worry. Is he going to call it quits? Is he frustrated? After all, who the hell is Ronan O'Shea?

I'm glad to say he doesn't take that tack. Instead, he gets Skype going and finally, we get to talk. I ask him how he is and what he's up to. It's telling how long he's been away from the UK – and how stressed I've become over the phone issues – that neither of us engage in that very British of traditions that is idle chit-chat about the weather. "I'm good," he says, "I've just finished putting together a new album, well, a live album called Rippin' Up NYC. I ask what we can expect to hear on the album and am told it'll be a mixture of his solo work as well as favourites from The Kinks back catalogue.

Davies is famous for indulging his love of both the band that made him famous and his experimental nature, often blending different songs together to create something unusual and different. It isn't always popular with fans who want to hear classic Kinks songs in their purest form, but it's one of the very things that made Davies one of the most exciting guitarists of the '60s.

## I KIND OF WANTED TO PLAY SOMEWHERE NEAR THE ARSENAL

I ask Dave – my fear of formality has dissipated – if he's looking forward to his show at the [Islington Assembly Hall](#) in December. Is it a homecoming of sorts? He was, after all, born just up the road in Fortis Hill, growing up as the youngest of eight in a working class family.

"Sort of," he says. "I kind of wanted to play somewhere near the Arsenal." So, he's an Arsenal fan. I confide that I'm a Spurs man, to which I expect a grunt. But nothing seems to get under Davies' skin as I'd expected from reading stories and interviews of days gone by. "Growing up, people used to support both teams. It was normal that you'd watch both London clubs." It warms my heart that he doesn't count Chelsea in the mix, but reminds me of what a different time we live in. "But seriously, I wanted to do a more rock and roll venue. I played at the Barbican a while ago and it was great, but it's an all-seater. I wanted something a bit more rock and roll for this gig."

We move on to other areas. I sense the singer isn't nearly as time-conscious as poor Rebecca. Following his stroke in 2004 he wrote a book, *Heal*, about the importance of meditation and how to go about it. Did he start meditating after the accident?

"No, it was something I'd always been into, but the stroke definitely brought it to the fore much more. It became really important." When I allude to my own laziness and/or inability to find time, he reminds me – fairly, I hasten to add – that it's about making time. "People always seem to find time to watch Eastenders," he says with a laugh, before becoming more serious, a characteristic that, well, characterises our chat. "It's all about your will power. Positive thoughts can build you

up, just as negative thoughts can drain you. It's very hard for young people now, I think. We have too much choice these days, we rarely find time to just sit and ponder it all. Meditation helps you keep it all at a good distance."

ARTISTS WERE FROWNED UPON IN ENGLAND. IT WAS DIFFERENT IN FRANCE OR ITALY, BUT OVER HERE YOU WERE MEANT TO GO GET A JOB AT SIXTEEN AND THAT WAS IT

A nice filter?

"Exactly!" he exudes, and the fourteen-year old boy in me who couldn't play guitar to save his life and emulate his heroes can't help but feel a rush of excitement. It's Dave Davies. Dave Davies is agreeing with me. I decide I'd better ask another question before I get over-excited. Did the illness change his writing style?

"Definitely. But I think it's just part of getting older. I don't think it was the illness as such, but as you grow older you view the world in a different way." And yet, I can sense him smiling down the line, which, with all credit to Skype, is behaving very well. "There's still that sixteen year old kid somewhere," he chuckles. "Years ago I was really into Astrology. I'm an Aquarius and they say Aquariuses are a little boy and an old man at the same time. It helps you look through that young boy's eyes. That youthfulness is essential to creative work." Given that Davies was chucked out of school at fifteen, it's fair to say it can only be a good thing that he's kept that rebellious streak into his sixties.

It's refreshing to hear an artist so eager to keep playing, to enjoy the now, but I can't help going back to his roots. I ask about the environment he had growing up and if it helped him craft his sound. I ask if being the youngest in a large family played a big role. "Maybe," he says, as if the thought had never occurred. "I felt very safe growing up. We were a big working class family. Very nurturing. Rather than being told to go get a proper job, we were encouraged. That was unusual in working class families at the time. Artists were frowned upon in England. It was different in France or Italy, but over here you were meant to go get a job at sixteen and that was it." It's

odd then, that the UK produced so many of the big acts of the sixties and seventies, I suggest. Or is it?

"It helped create that rebellion. Music was the only way for a lot of working class people to get heard and they were starting to get heard. There was that rebelliousness."

I HATE THE WAY AMERICANS CALL IT SOCCER. FOOTBALL TAUGHT ME A LOT

In his relaxed manner, he swiftly moves onto other matters. We get to talking about manhood, how, I do not know. Manhood was different back then, he tells me.

"You had to be a man. But sometimes you get to the point where all you can do is cry. That's just the body telling you what to do. It's all a part of nature. Our nervous system is like a tree. There must be enormous parallels. Just because we're not planted in the earth doesn't mean we're not connected." Does this connect with art, I wonder. "Definitely. What people forget is that the results aren't important. It's important, natural, to express yourself. Like in football. And definitely in rock music. In football you get some good nil-nils."

I struggle to remember them, but I see his point. Before I can continue to scan the recesses of my memory for entertaining – or meaningful – nil-nils he tells me about the importance of football in his youth.

"Football was important," he says, before scoffing. "I hate the way Americans call it soccer (he lives in the States). Football taught me a lot. It taught you how to relate to people. Whether you're playing against them or working together in a team. I've always liked Arsene Wenger." I haven't, for obvious reasons, but Davies' take on it has me convinced (a bit). "Arsene Wenger is almost spiritual in his approach, what with all the money floating around in football these days. And I think that gets overlooked."

Our conversation thus far has been so pleasant and my interviewee so forthcoming that I almost don't want to talk about conflict – famously rife in The Kinks – but we've more or less touched on it. Was conflict central to The Kink's creativity, or a destructive element?

"A bit of both. It's a very tricky one," he says, musingly. "Luckily, from my point of view, I had very nurturing older sisters. Instead of looking out for yourself to survive, it was all about sharing to survive. You had to pitch in and share. I mean, that was prevalent in tribal history. It seemed to function quite well. You had carpenters, woodworkers, the lot. There was a wise man or a wise woman. I like the Hopi Indian concept."

I confess my ignorance.

I DON'T SEE WHY THE KINKS CAN'T DO SOMETHING. WE'RE NOT DEAD YET

"They used to sit down in a quiet circle. No one was the leader. I think materialism has created a monster. Everyone needs to work, everyone needs a bit of money, but it's definitely gone too far. There's a lot of people with no money at all and just a few with lots of money. I've always been a big Star Trek fan," he begins.

I mishear Star Trek for Sartre and begin scribbling this down. Dave Davies is a huge Sartre fan? There's a nice scoop, Ronan. But when he quotes Spock, I realise my folly. "As Leonard Nimoy used to say. It's 'illogical.'" He might be a fictional vulcan, but the pointy-eared one had a point, as does Davies, who goes on to rail against patriarchy. I've grown used to his laid back, chatty style, mingled with moments of deep, pensive thought. "When New York was designed it was all straight lines and grids," he says, "very patriarchal. I think men have a fear of the reactionary and it's not healthy," he says, pondering over the way of things. For a man who stared death in the face just over a decade ago, it's understandable that he'd be a thoughtful type, and

he seems happy with this way of life. He seems as if he'd be happy to talk all day, but I can hear Rebecca telling him he has another interview. Time for one last question, and yes, it's about The Kinks, or a possible Kinks reunion, something he said he'd be up for in a recent tweet.

"I don't see why we can't do something," he says, that unseen smile on the other end still there. "We're not dead yet."

Far from it. And with that, Davies thanks me for talking to him, rather than the other way around. I say goodbye and let him get onto the next call. If this Kink has a chink in his armour, it's that he's all too happy to take his time in life, to sit back, relax, and enjoy it all. Doesn't seem like such a bad idea to me. May he live long and prosper.