

Never mind the bollocks

Foul-mouthed folk troubadour

Damien Rice may think the music industry is a load of shite, but it's not stopped him from releasing the heartbreak album of the year

Words: **Richard Purvis** in London

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DAMIEN RICE

This is Damien's 'happy' face. No, really, it is

Damien Rice is a prick. He is a fucker, a complete dick, a pain in the arse. He is a bastard, and everything he does is a fucked-up load of bollocks. Wouldn't think so to look at him, would you? The scruffily earnest Irish singer-songwriter seems as nice as apples, and his home-recorded debut album 'O', frothing over with sensitivity and gentle anguish, has become one of the sleeper hits of the year since his crowd-charming turn at Glastonbury made him the David Gray it's OK to like. But no, Damien is a prick alright, and the rest. He must be – those descriptions are all his own.

NME collared the self-abusing balladeer in Nashville, Tennessee midway through a US tour the success of which has made Damien distinctly uncomfortable. Not just because he feels undeserving of stardom (see above), but because he honestly doesn't want it. This is the man who once dumped Polygram Records in order to grow vegetables in Tuscany. Who then set up his own label in order to release his own album on his own terms, never mind how many copies it may or may not sell. Fame sits on him like a bad hat, and he really would be happy if it blew off in the wind tomorrow.

NME: Why do you keep slagging yourself off?

Damien Rice: "It's just being honest about the fact that, sometimes, I'm a fucking dick. As are you, probably. I'm just saying it's OK to accept that you're a dick sometimes, a liar sometimes, a horny bastard sometimes. Because people tell me I'm great so much – well, what would you say if someone came up to you and said, 'You are amazing, you have completely inspired my life...?'"

Run away, probably.

"Ha ha! I haven't tried that option yet. It's ironic, the songs are all about how I was an absolute bastard to someone, how I fucked this girl over because I was obsessed with another one, or whatever. I make a mess of things and I

hurt people, but out of that I end up writing a song and people think I'm great. That's why I feel guilty."

Is it fair to say fame is just not important to you?

"I don't want to give the impression I don't give a toss. It's just, I already did the typical thing. You make a demo, you get signed, they promote you and make all this fuss – and I didn't enjoy it. I had all the things I thought I wanted when I was a young kid, and I was just miserable. I was spending too much time not doing the things I wanted to do. I've already sold enough records now; all I want to do is travel the world. I just want to be me – more me,

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more honest, than I have been in the past. All this stuff about doing Letterman and being nominated for all these awards... bollocks, bollocks, bollocks."

And this interview?

"What we're doing here is a load of bollocks when you think about it. The whole entertainment industry is a load of shite, really."

If you're making something beautiful that can give people a worthwhile experience, everything else is just a way of facilitating that connection, isn't it?

"It's true, music is amazing, and sometimes I do feel guilty for being so lucky. It's just... a bit weird. All I want is, erm... what do I want? I actually don't know, ha ha!"

You don't have to decide right now.

"That's it! You've actually put your finger on it. What I want today is what I want today, and tomorrow that

might change. There are certain things... like when I'm bursting for a crap, I have to have a crap. Fine, I live with the limitations, as does everyone else, but there are other things I don't need. I don't need to do all these things people say you have to do in order to be 'big'. I just want to be good."

So if another major label came along with a massive sack of cash?

"Forget the money thing, I don't really care about it. If anything I feel uncomfortable with too much money. I prefer being the underdog, I really do – that feeling of always having something to fight for. You know, we went double platinum in Ireland and it was exciting, but that has faded now. It's like masturbating – you get something out of your system and you feel good, maybe, but then you go off and do something else."

What a lovely image. You're being quite talkative considering you didn't even want to do this interview.

"Oh, this thing was booked in so I wasn't just going to pull it on you, but... it's just that I want to do a really good gig tonight, and if I do too much promo I know what happens – I get irritated from talking about myself, I'm distracted, and I'm not in the spirit for it."

Oh. Sorry for ruining your gig.

"No, you haven't, honestly. I'm sorry for ranting at you. Fuck it man, you know what I really have to say? I haven't got a fucking clue what I'm doing. Really. I feel like a puppy dog who's just floating through life, a sniff over here, a sniff over there. As long as the lead isn't put on me I'm happy, but I really don't have a fucking clue what I'm doing. Ha ha!"

A fucked-up prick who doesn't know what he's doing? Bollocks, Damien. Bollocks, bollocks, bollocks. ♡



Hear Damien Rice live tracks on NME.COM/AUDIO