



# elbow

## Good evening Hong Kong!

THE FIRST THING that strikes you about Guy Garvey, Elbow's lead singer, as he walks into the room is his unassuming charm. As we move to the bar, one of the hotel waitresses - who hasn't realised there are celebrity guests in the hotel - tells him we can't sit down, as it isn't open yet. Rather than give it the big "I am", Garvey apologises and politely asks if there's anywhere else we can go. The waitress walks away.

Welcome to Hong Kong.

Elbow haven't been able to take in much of Hong Kong, apart from a boat trip to Victoria Harbour and a few beers in Wan Chai (a short stroll from their hotel) but Garvey's excited about their first ever trip here. "I've heard a lot about the place and wanted to come for years," he says "I've always been fascinated by Hong Kong and actually wanted to come before it was handed back [to China]. It's definitely lived up to my expectations. It's going to be great because we're relatively new here. Absolutely brand new here really."

It's perhaps because they've waited twenty years to achieve notoriety that the whole band emit such a genial, down-to-earth charisma. Their arduous rise to fame meant it was ten years before they got their first record deal but the band have gone on


to win almost every music prize around - including Mercury, Brit, Ivor Novello and NME awards - a long way since their first 1990 gig together at a half-empty college in Manchester.

Garvey says he still sometimes finds it hard to adjust to their popularity. Their fourth album, *The Seldom Seen Kid*, has now sold well over a million copies and the lead single, *One Day Like This*, has been endlessly played as an uplifting backdrop, from sports events to documentaries.

"We were having breakfast at a B&B after a mate's wedding and there was a really serious programme about bell ringers on the telly. They were all talking intensely about winning this competition and I'm thinking, what the fuck. And when they win, there's a slo-mo of them cheering with "One Day Like This" playing in the background. Me and the misses were in hysterics."

Their music's been described as intelligent and personal with an emotional directness that floors you and they're frequently compared with Radiohead, The Smiths, Talk Talk and Peter Gabriel. But Garvey cites a much broader range of eclectic influences on their music. "I had five older sisters, so a lot came from them - a real wide spectrum really, from Leonard Cohen, Joni Mitchell, Led Zeppelin - progressive rock - Genesis, 10CC, Supertramp. I had one sister into disco, one punk, a soul sister."

Their rise to fame after the success of *The Seldom Seen Kid*



“There’s nothing better than being paid for what you’ve been paying to do for most of your life.”

saw them headline Wembley Arena, support U2 at Wembley Stadium in front of 90,000 people and return to Manchester in a homecoming concert at the MEN Arena.

In 2009 they played two extraordinary gigs with the Halle orchestra, Britain's oldest symphony orchestra - "The original Manchester band", as Garvey calls them - where the band re-worked tracks with the help of composer and conductor Joe Duddell. Part of the Manchester International Festival, the concerts sold out the 2,000 capacity Bridgewater Hall within hours and drew an additional 5,000 music fans to the nearby Castlefield Arena, where the concert was projected on a big screen.

And it was at Glastonbury in June this year where Elbow celebrated their 20-year anniversary in front of tens of thousands of fans. Their performance of "One Day Like This" was described as "the greatest moment of the weekend" by the *Independent*, with the *Guardian* adding the performance was "not just the highlight of this year's festival, but one of the all time greats."

Garvey pinpoints the performance as one of the proudest moments of their career to date, "This one was really special. Glastonbury is the big gig for all bands in the UK. You almost feel like all festivals are a rehearsal for that one."

Garvey also speaks proudly of acclaim from John Cale, musician, songwriter, record producer and founder member of rock band The Velvet Underground. "Finding that John Cale



chose us [Elbow] as one of his desert island discs was fantastic; because he's the godfather of hard rock, there's no indie music without John Cale. He brought music experimentation into pop music, right at the start of all the bands we loved - to have him say he couldn't do without one of our tunes is amazing."

Their latest album, *Build a Rocket Boys!* has been nominated for this year's Mercury Prize and praised as one of the band's best yet, reaching number two in the UK album charts. According to the *Daily Telegraph*, the band followed the success of *Seldom Seen Kid* with "greatness and without fuss," providing "more of the same: richly textured, intelligent and

warm stuff."

So what next? Garvey says, "We've got ideas. It'd be great to do stuff like that [the Halle orchestra collaboration] at least once for every album. There's talk of us using a disused movie studio, doing a real time version of the album with different sets in different rooms, walking between sets. It's in its infancy."

It's time to leave. Elbow are due on stage at Kowloon's KITEC arena in less than two hours. Much has been made in the media about how likeable they are and it's easy to see why. With true modesty from a man that's old enough - and grateful enough - not to be conceited with mainstream success, Garvey adds, "Are you coming to the concert tonight? No need to get a taxi, we'll give you a lift on the bus."

