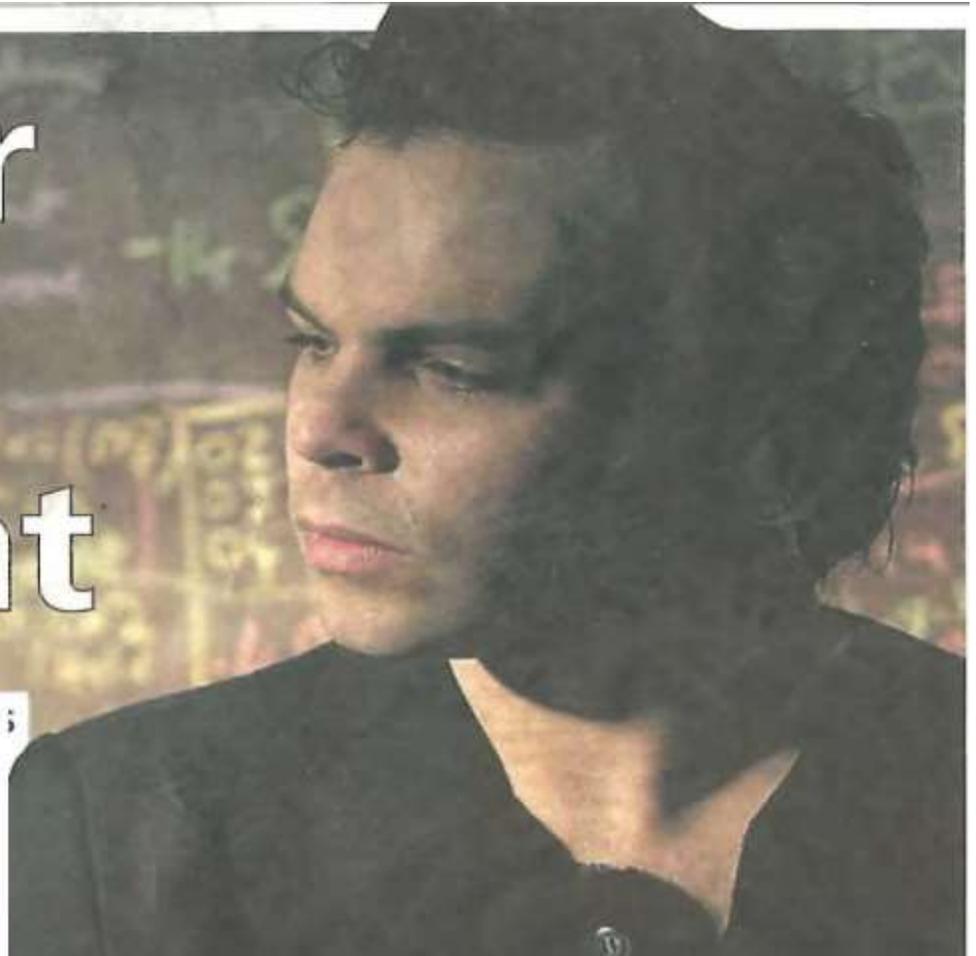


Better than Alright



He's proud of *those* Supergrass hits, but Gaz Coombes' solo career is soaring now. **Tim J Hughes** catches up with the Wheatley boy ahead of his homecoming gig

Gaz Coombes is having the time of his life. The former Supergrass frontman is back in Oxfordshire and creating what he describes as his finest work yet.

His solo album *Here Come The Bombs* is a masterpiece of sonic experimentation, largely recorded at his home in Wheatley. And it has received rave reviews.

"It's some of the best music I've ever written," he says warmly, while relaxing at home.

"The lyrics are my best and most honest and I am really proud of it."

It is two years since Gaz, 36, decided to pull the plug on Supergrass - an amicable end to a remarkable period which saw this chirpy bunch of village boys conquer the world.

Gaz was 16 when he took his first steps into the maelstrom of the Oxford music scene, first as a member of The Jennifers, before forming Supergrass with bandmate Danny Goffey, and friend Mick Quinn, whom he had met while working at the local Harvester. The band, which later expanded to take in Gaz's brother Rob, proved to be one of the biggest of the '90s, having six

Top 20 albums, three going platinum. Indeed their first album, *I Should Coco*, proved the biggest-selling debut for Parlophone since the Beatles released *Please Please Me* in 1963.

And that's not even mentioning the six Top Ten singles, and the trophy cabinet full of Mercury, Brit and Ivor Novello awards ...

But while fans of the supersized sideburn-sporting singer may have mourned the end of the band, spirits have been well and truly raised by the release of his solo debut. Gaz, who plays everything on the record, is

following up its release with a solo tour, on Saturday playing his former home - in Cowley Road, Oxford.

The show at the O2 Academy, is just down the road from the house he rented when Supergrass were in their infancy.

And while some fans may be itching to hear the old hits, Gaz insists the show will most certainly be 'Supergrass-lite'.

Continued on page 3

I still hang out with the band'



"I always throw in a few covers and a few things me and Danny did with Hot Rats. And if the gig feels right, I could play something familiar. But I want to do it in my own fun way. I don't want to be playing diluted versions of *Caught by the Fuzz*. Supergrass was fun and I'm proud of the songs, but don't feel I have to play them. I can perform my new record and let that be.

"It's tricky. Sometimes you need to give people what you think they should have. But I don't think people will feel anything's missing. I haven't had people shouting at me to play Supergrass songs, and it's really cool that there's this respect for what I'm doing now.

"I'm delighted with the album. The songs sound tighter and tighter and it has stepped up a gear. It's an amazing performance; anything can happen!"

The album, partially recorded at producer Sam Williams's Templesound Studios in Oxford, oozes dreamy synths, pulsating grooves and distorted guitars. What was the process behind it, I ask. "Some was born out of the frustration of things not working out at the end of Supergrass," he says, seriously.

"I had a lot of ideas. And I was lucky enough to have my own studio to put things down as quickly as I could. It was exciting writing and recording as most things are second or third takes, so are not overdone.

"I wanted a quite instinctive record. In the past we got into bad habits by taking a long time at things. Lyrics took a while to polish and we all had an input. There was also an element of perfectionism. I've enjoyed this fresh approach though, and have heard the same from the other boys."

Ah, yes... the rest of the band. So do they still hang out? "Yeah, we are still close," he says. "I see Mick a lot and Rob's my brother - so nothing has changed there. I went on holiday with Danny a few weeks ago, which was fun.

"Socially it has always been good. It was just working together wasn't great, and it was tough to get good stuff out. The dynamics weren't as we wanted them."

But he insists he has no regrets over a big period, not just for music, but for their personal and professional lives. "I have amazing memories and the stuff we achieved was amazing," he says.

"But it was the right thing to do and I have now been able to push myself in a different way. It was a big thing coming out of my comfort zone. We've been best buddies for years and always able to fall back on each other. But it has been good to show I am capable of so much."



Gaz Coombes

02 Academy,
Oxford

Saturday, 7 pm

Tickets £12.50
ticketweb.co.uk

***Here Come The
Bombs out on Hot
Fruit Recordings***

I don't want to be playing diluted versions of *Caught By The Fuzz*

The Oxford show comes after the band were honoured at another venue close to their hearts; The Jericho Tavern. Gaz, Mick, Danny and Rob were feted at the Walton Street pub last month, receiving a Performing Right Society (PRS) Heritage Award and plaque. The accolade, which follows Gaz's return to Wheatley, also cemented his Oxfordshire links.

"I love this area," he says. "I travelled the world, saw everything and had lots of experiences. I spent 10 years in Brighton and some time in London and in the States, but personal circumstances drew me back."

These included the death of his mother, Eileen, eight years ago. Gaz came back to live with his dad, John, and says he is delighted to give his own daughters Raya May and Tiger a country upbringing.

"I am back with Dad, which is great," he says. "A lot of people probably can't wait to get rid of the house they grew up in, but it's a great place. Wheatley is also a big village and Gaz Coombes living here is not big news, so I enjoy a non-intrusive lifestyle."

"I am now just happy to back next to that big field of cows. They may not be the same cows as when I was younger - they've all been eaten - but they are still the mums and dads and grandads of the cows we played to when we were in Supergrass!"