

'There were times I couldn't stand him' — the Kinks brothers reunited

Ray and Dave Davies have worked on a new exhibition in London together. They talk to **Ed Pottton** about fraught family dynamics and recovering from a stroke

It was the high point of Dave Davies' time with the Kinks. "Well, there were a lot of low points," he says. There's even my attempt to be positive. You can't get away from it, though — the London band are synonymous with conflict, mainly between Dave, the guitarist, and his older brother Ray, the lead songwriter. There were times when I couldn't stand him," Dave says. "I was storming out of the studio. That relationship has always been built on trust, although we hated each other."

One of the big four British bands of the Sixties with the Beatles, the Rolling Stones and the Who, the Kinks were a swaggering blend of bludge and wit, with 12 Top Ten hits from 1964 to 1969, including the imperishable *You Really Got Me*, *All Day and All of the Night* and *Waterloo Sunset*. Yet they were as known for self-sabotage as they were for musical genius. "Always," says Dave, 79, speaking from his home in New Jersey. "You crash and burn and it's really bad."

The animosity between the brothers ebbed and flowed for decades. Dave raised Ray's first wedding by getting brutally drunk, they had a massive fight on a tour bus in 1996 and at Dave's 50th birthday party Ray stamped on the cake. Yet now they are closer than ever, emotionally if not physically (Ray remains in his native north London). "It's mine-also, really, how we've become so bonded," Dave says. "The most moving rapprochement in rock started under challenging circumstances in 2004, when Dave had a stroke. He was 57 at the time and had just been interviewed by the BBC at Broadcasting House in London when he collapsed. Luckily my son Christian was with me and he helped me. I didn't lose consciousness. I was strangely aware of everything," he says. "I was actually quite happy."

Dave has made a good recovery, although his speech is slurred and he sometimes needs prompting from his American girlfriend, Rebecca Wilson, a former writer who works as his PA.

He hates being patronised, though. "People can be really clumsy. It's terrible." Two big things that helped him after the stroke were the support of his brother and his rediscovery of painting. "Art saved my life, really," he says. "It was very exploratory and I found I could do things I couldn't do before. It was a real liberation."

Wilson, 52, fetches some of Dave's work to show me psychedelic abstract pieces swirling with colour. "We were posing these on the internet," she says. Ray saw them — he's a lurker on Instagram — and said, "What's this?" And it kind of brought them together."

Those two elements — fraternal love and visual art — combine in *The Kinks: Brothers in a Central London Gallery*, a collaboration between Dave, Ray and Christian Furr, the British artist who has painted portraits of the Kinks. It includes portraits of the Rolling Stones, Jimi Hendrix and Kate Bush. The project started when Furr painted Ray.

"I was busy doing the art and the music started to come back"

A series of pictures based on a photograph of Dave and Ray taken in 1961 in a photo booth at East Finchley Tube station, not far from where they grew up in Muswell Hill. "Of all the photos of Dave and me, this one is the most poignant," says Ray, 82, via email. "I found the photo by accident when it dropped out of an envelope. It brought back memories of innocent time when two brothers were painting a life. I looked at it and I was modern considering it was shot all those years ago."

When Dave first saw Furr's paintings, which combine versions of the photograph with vibrant overlays and Union Jacks in yellow and green, he cried. "It was hard not to consider how his relationship with Ray had fractured. 'It made me think, 'What the hell are we doing?'" he says. Spontaneously, he began painting

Right: the Kinks in the 1960s, clockwise from top: Ray Davies, Mick Avory, Dave Davies and Pete Quaife. Below: works from *The Kinks: Brothers*, depicting Dave and Ray



The Kinks: Brothers is at Gibson Garage, London, to Sep 6



over Furr's pictures in broad, colorful strokes. "It was just on the spur of the moment." They showed the paintings to Ray, who gave his approval, with one tweak. "I suggested darkening the tone to give the effect of times past," Ray says. Typical Ray, some might say, he has a reputation for world-beating grumpiness. Not so, Ray told me in 2010. "I'm a joy to live with. Companions have said that I make them laugh and that's my best quality. I'm seen like a dour, serious guy but nothing pleases me more than making someone laugh."

Despite everything, Dave can't help but agree. "We enjoy each other's company," he says, and they have been making art together since childhood. "We made a comic book on the wall of our bedroom — we had Andy Capp and Dracula," Dave says. Compared with music, art is "a lot freer. It doesn't have to have any consequence. It can just form really quickly. You don't always know what you're doing but it nurtures itself into something interesting."

Ray had more formal training at Hurlingham College of Art in the early Sixties. "My years at art college taught

musical *Sunny Afternoon*, "It really measured into a great relationship." Dave and I don't have any kids together so I don't have a dog in this fight," says Wilson, who used her neutrality to help arrange a dinner in London a few years ago for the brothers, their partners and some of their children. It happened at Kiplings, an Indian restaurant near Ray's house in Highgate, whose patrons also include Liam Gallagher and Keir Starmer. "It was so nice," Wilson says. "Ray's girlfriend Alma said, 'I can't believe you got Ray out of the house.' At the end of the meal Ray managed to live up to his reputation for stinkiness. It was about ten people, big fancy dinner, and he goes, 'Can I see the check?' Wilson says. "Dave hands it to him and he goes, 'Ouch' and hands it back."

"It's all a mess," Dave says of his brother's fragility. "We never had anything jaw-dropping." The sons of a slaughterhouse worker and a

housewife, they were rivals from the start. Ray grew up with six older sisters but lost some of their attention when Dave arrived.

"There is a scar on my face," Ray told me in 2010. "He was very good at maths, good academically wise and showed I was the more creative one." "Music was always really easy for me," Dave says. Both brothers sang in the Kinks. "I could work out harmonies really easily. I managed to write in and out of what Ray was doing." Yet it was Ray who was lauded as the songwriting maestro. Was it hard to escape his shadow?

"Oh, terrible," Dave says. "But then I realised that he had to find himself (as a musician). I wasn't his help and I didn't realise it. The horrible thing that happened — it's all there for a purpose. You need that bonding of difference."

Dave has been given his dues in recent years, notably for the jagged guitar sound on *You Really Got Me*, made by slitting his amp cone with a razor blade, which influenced punk and heavy metal. "It's nice to be recognised," he says. "When we created it, nobody liked it. He is playing guitar again now, which he puts down to the painting. After his stroke, 'I was busy doing the art and the music started to come back.' In October he will do a few shows in America, playing Kinks classics, telling stories and answering questions."

"These shows come out of his Saturday jams with his friend Rob Fitch," Wilson says. "I was like, 'Bring Rob over because socialisation is so important for older people and we're kind of a little bit because Dave is famous.'"

He and Ray last shared a stage in 2015 and a studio in 2019. Will it ever happen again? "I don't know, but never say never," Dave says. How about another art project? "I'd like to think about that."

"Dave doesn't like to put the mockers on things," Wilson says. Least of all the great loss he suffered in 1995, after a trip to see the Kinks

It's the UK albums chart's 70th birthday: what came out on top?

By Will Hodgkinson

As the UK's official albums chart reaches its 70th birthday, a strange thing has happened to it.

The most streamed album, according to the Official Charts Company, however, are another matter altogether. At the top is by Ed Sheeran and at No 4 is *The Highlights* by the Weeknd, both nowhere to be seen in the bestselling albums list, while two compilations, Fleetwood Mac's 50 Years and Queen's *Time Flies* 1944-2019 sit the second and third spots. These positions are based on the total streaming numbers of the songs featured on them, which would more often than not have been listened to individually. In other words, the average Sheeran fan is not listening to his album the whole way through, which makes you wonder, in the streaming age, what even is an album? And where does its future lie?

If you look at the UK's top albums based on pure sales, Queen's *Greatest Hits* is at the top again. *Set Pepper* beats *What's the Story*, that is because it reflects for the most part an era in the late 1960s and early 21st century — Adele's 2011 album *21* being the last huge seller of the physical era — when you went to the shops to buy an album, whether on vinyl, tape or CD.

The CD boom of the Nineties created a boost in album sales that is reflected in sales figures for Queen, Abba and other massive heritage acts.

The biggest streaming albums, including Dua Lipa's self-titled debut and Olivia Rodrigo's *Sour*, are reissues of an era when most people are content to listen to music on their phone, which doesn't necessarily lead to artist engagement. \$2.50 is the American R&B star SZA's seventh most globally streamed album, which you would never have guessed if you saw her briefly attended Glastonbury 2024 headline slot.

Streaming explains *What's the Story* coming above *Set Pepper* in the combined list: a home release in 1995, all of its songs received a massive listening boost as last year's Oasis

reunion became the biggest event in music. Perhaps the most surprising thing, however, is that the album has survived at all.

The album is doing in front of our very eyes," argued the music industry commentator Rob Leifer, and that was in 2012. Yet the format continues to dominate. I'm a judge for the Mercury music prize (or British album of the year and there were 201 entries this year, young and old, jazz to rock, rap to folk, they're all at it).

The music album has been a robust format," says Tom Kiehl, CEO of UK Music. "It's that creature, that link to the artist, that people really want to invest in. Actually, while artists clearly find the album the ideal way to get a theme across — Lily Allen's *Was Not Meant To Be*, a portrait of a marriage in crisis, being a good example — I'm not so sure most people still listen to an album in full."

I do, but then it's my job. My kids listen to music all the time but they never buy albums, and a quick look at my daughter's latest playlist suggests very little commitment to period or genre: there's everything from Leonard Cohen to Björk to the rapper of the moment, Drake.

Streaming has made global engagement in music bigger than ever but it also means people tend to pick and choose from the history of recorded music, rather than sit down and immerse themselves in an album in full.

As we reach the 70th birthday of the UK album charts, the future is clear: artists will continue to make albums and listeners will continue to pick their favourite songs from those albums and stick them on a playlist. More would include songs from Miles Davis's *Kind of Blue* and John Maynard's *Blue as well as Beggar's Banquet* by the Rolling Stones, Moon Safari by Air, Syd Barrett's *The Madcap Laughs* and *Forever Changes* by Love.

Bestselling albums UK sales
1 *Greatest Hits* Queen (1981)
2 *Gold* Abba (1992)
3 *Set Pepper* Lennox (1984)
4 *The Beatles* (1967)
5 *What's the Story* Morning Glory? Oasis (1995)
6 *The Dark Side of the Moon* Pink Floyd (1973)
7 *Thriller* Michael Jackson (1982)
8 *Brothers in Arms* Dire Straits (1985)
9 *Rumours* Fleetwood Mac (1977)
10 *Greatest Hits* Queen (1991)

Most streamed album UK
1 *Ed Sheeran* (2017)
2 *50 Years* Don't Stop Fleetwood Mac (2018)
3 *Time Flies* 1944-2019 Oasis (2019)
4 *The Highlights* The Weeknd (2021)
5 *Certain Call* The Hives (2019)
6 *Diamonds* Elton John (2017)
7 *The Greatest Showman* — Motion Picture Cast Recording (2017)
8 *Divinity* Unleashed to a Hellfire Extent Lewis Capaldi (2019)
9 *Gold* Abba (1992)
10 *AM* Arctic Monkeys (2013)



Liam Gallagher and Freddie Mercury