

PREFACE

I first saw Enter Shikari at Download Festival in 2006. As a young and naively optimistic little moshers, I had studiously written down all the names and stage times of the 30-odd bands I wanted to see that weekend, which started with Shikari in the MySpace tent around Friday lunchtime. My friends and I had never listened to the band before, we were just going on a recommendation, but what I saw inside that blue marquee is still etched into my memory. As a palpable buzz hummed through the crowd, a maniacal Rou Reynolds sprinted onstage in tiny fluorescent shorts and hurled into their eponymous opening track as the floor began to move. Pits opened, my friend Spud's recently purchased straw hat was torn to pieces, and it was *joyous*. There and then, I knew I'd found something special and had to find out more.

In the weeks and months that followed, I gorged on every MySpace upload, hitting repeat on everything from 'Empty' to 'OK, Time for Plan B'. I repeatedly asked the promoter of my local venue to book Shikari, to no avail, so I found myself travelling across the UK to see them four more times over the next 12 months. They're now probably the band I've seen live the most times – from 100-capacity sweatboxes to the main stage of Reading Festival.

Growing up I had been a die-hard metal fan, pounding my ears with Slipknot, Slayer and Sabbath, but this felt radically different to anything I'd heard before. The fact it was clearly Not Your Parents' Music was certainly a bonus, but the connection ran deeper than rave-infused punk – it felt so unbelievably more *real* than anything else happening at that moment in time.

I bought *Take to the Skies* the day it was released, overjoyed at the improved production of songs I'd heard a thousand times before. But it didn't feel like a must-listen item because it was trendy, it felt *important* to own a copy – to show up and support something organic and grassroots, to give two fingers to the mainstream. It gave me a new appreciation for what music could and *should* be, not mass-market nonsense but something striving for originality and fizzing with genuine human emotion. I honestly don't know if I'd be a music journalist today without them.

The first time I met the band was a brief ten-minute interview with Chris and Rory backstage at the UK Warped Tour in London in 2012, while a magazine job took me to Rou's house the following year for an 'At Home with ...' feature, where we discussed his recent potato harvest. Rock'n'roll, right? Since then I've interviewed Rou (and rest of the band) many times – from *Kerrang!* cover stories to video calls with fans across the world for the release of *Nothing Is True & Everything Is Possible*. In fact, over 70 hours' worth of interviews went into this book, including the wider Shikari family of producers, managers, collaborators and industry folk, all sharing stories behind some of my favourite records and gigs that I'll never forget. Not all of it made the cut – like the time Rob accidentally poisoned producer David Kosten's dog with cashew nuts – but this is the definitive story of Enter Shikari, and a thank you to the band for changing my life forever.

bottle off me and launched it at him. One of the bottles hit him in the nose and he started bleeding. That was his album cover too, which seems too much of a coincidence that it happened at a show! He was just so excited and happy to be there, but it was the weirdest thing ever. I don't remember the Red Hot Chili Peppers' set at all, just that."



2017 - Tom Pullen

What was your first guitar?

"It was my dad's Yamaha Pacifica. He didn't even give it to me, really, it was always his - I was just borrowing his guitar. Everyone used to have Squire Strats as their first guitar, but I had a Yamaha Pacifica and I loved it. It's probably in my parents' loft now, I'd love to get it down and try it again. I had a little Peavey combo amp and I asked my guitar teacher to reluctantly show me how to turn the gain up and make it distorted. My first guitar pedal was a Boss Metal Zone, which is a black pedal that just does exactly what it says on the tin. I turned all the knobs up to 10! A friend of mine had one and he showed me his settings, and I was like, 'Why don't you just have them all at 10? Why don't you want it as extreme as possible? That's the most fun!'"

What is your current guitar set-up?

"I've got a Fender Telecaster with a Kemper amp and that is literally it. A Kemper is a digital amp where you can steal

should give it a chorus or two – it was so fun and energetic. Being so short it was over too soon and didn't give the riffs enough airtime, but it's after that I realise the shortness of the song is what makes it so great. It kind of epitomised what we were doing, that short, sharp, loud, aggressive explosion that we knew our parents would hate."

Another key factor in the song's success is its video, which sees the band take part in what appears to be a Japanese children's television show, complete with a crocodile (played by Lee Burgess from their management team) and a choreographed dance routine, which Rory didn't learn too easily. Certainly a far cry from the big-budget 'No Sleep Tonight' clip or the forest-dwelling 'Anything Can Happen in the Next Half Hour', it follows *A Flash Flood of Colour*'s direction in highlighting that Shikari actually have a sense of humour hiding behind their placards.

JAPAN

The vibrant video for 'The Paddington Frisk' wasn't a one-off encounter with the Land of the Rising Sun, Enter Shikari had a long history with Japan by this point. And unlike their love affair with the United States, things started moving in the right direction from day one, with Chris remembering 'Sorry, You're Not a Winner' being played on the huge screens in Shibuya Square, Tokyo.

"It was the first place we went to that accepted Enter Shikari and seemed so wildly different to what we knew growing up in the UK," says Rob. "You're dropped in the centre of Tokyo, and it's nothing but lights and billions of people all around you, and it felt like such a different world, but for our music to be accepted, to have *genuine* fans out there, was mind-blowing to us. I couldn't quite understand why, maybe it's because we were doing something colourful and explosive and different."

There was a huge buzz around *Take to the Skies*, almost cracking into the top 30 of the Japanese charts, but in what has almost become tradition, the band failed to capitalise on the momentum. Jetlagged and spending every night drinking until the early hours in any rock bar they could find, the first shows Shikari played in Japan in 2007 were a mess and what Rory believes to be some of their worst ever.

"We weren't professional enough to cash in on it," says Chris of the initial hype Shikari had on the other side of the world. "We were young, the show wasn't slick, it was punk and rough around the edges. That, coupled with the fact we were out all night drinking, it just didn't quite work for us, despite having the best start we could've hoped for."

Even being booked to play one of the country's premier music fests, Summer Sonic, didn't help the band's cause, as Rob notes that various technical issues led to another terrible set in front of an audience who were still yet to see a *good* Shikari show.

that would be so fucking embarrassing. Also the thought of getting up and leaving the assembly was massively scary. The whole thing I remember being horrible to the point that I used to skip assembly. I can remember also, at break-times, going to the toilet and locking myself in a cubicle and spending my break-time there. I had two or three friends from primary school, but for the first few weeks I didn't know where people went for break-times; I didn't know what to do, and I was just too scared to talk to a group of kids. I knew it wasn't 'normal' - not every kid was hiding in cubicles and feeling sick in assembly - I knew it was weird, but again I didn't know it had a name, I didn't know anything about it, I just knew it was pretty horrible."



2016 - Tom Pullen

Did you think that something might be wrong, or just that this was your lot in life?

"I remember writing a song in Scotland, three chords on an acoustic guitar, and it was called 'Worries, Cares and Consequences'. I knew I was a worrier. The first thing that I thought I may have was hypochondria, but it's what I now know to be interoceptive anxiety. Every time we learned about something in school, I came home like, 'I think I've got this'. Any new sensation or new lump, I would be shitting it and going to my parents. I can remember almost passing out in an assembly about testicular cancer and another one about