

THE TWILIGHT SINGERS

WHATEVER DID HAPPEN TO YOUR SOUL?

by Scott McLennan

Formidable raconteur Greg Dulli has spent the last 20 years lurking on the margins where intoxicating meets intoxicated. Whether it's his output with The Afghan Whigs, his Mark Lanegan collaboration The Gutter Twins or as benevolent dictator of The Twilight Singers, a glance through his discography finds the restless wordsmith constantly engaged in an internal scuffle. Dark versus light, soul versus seedy, violence versus pacifism, sex versus love... the tussles Dulli has captured on record are numerous. But what's the main tussle going on in Dulli's head with the release of The Twilight Singers' fifth album *Dynamite Steps*?

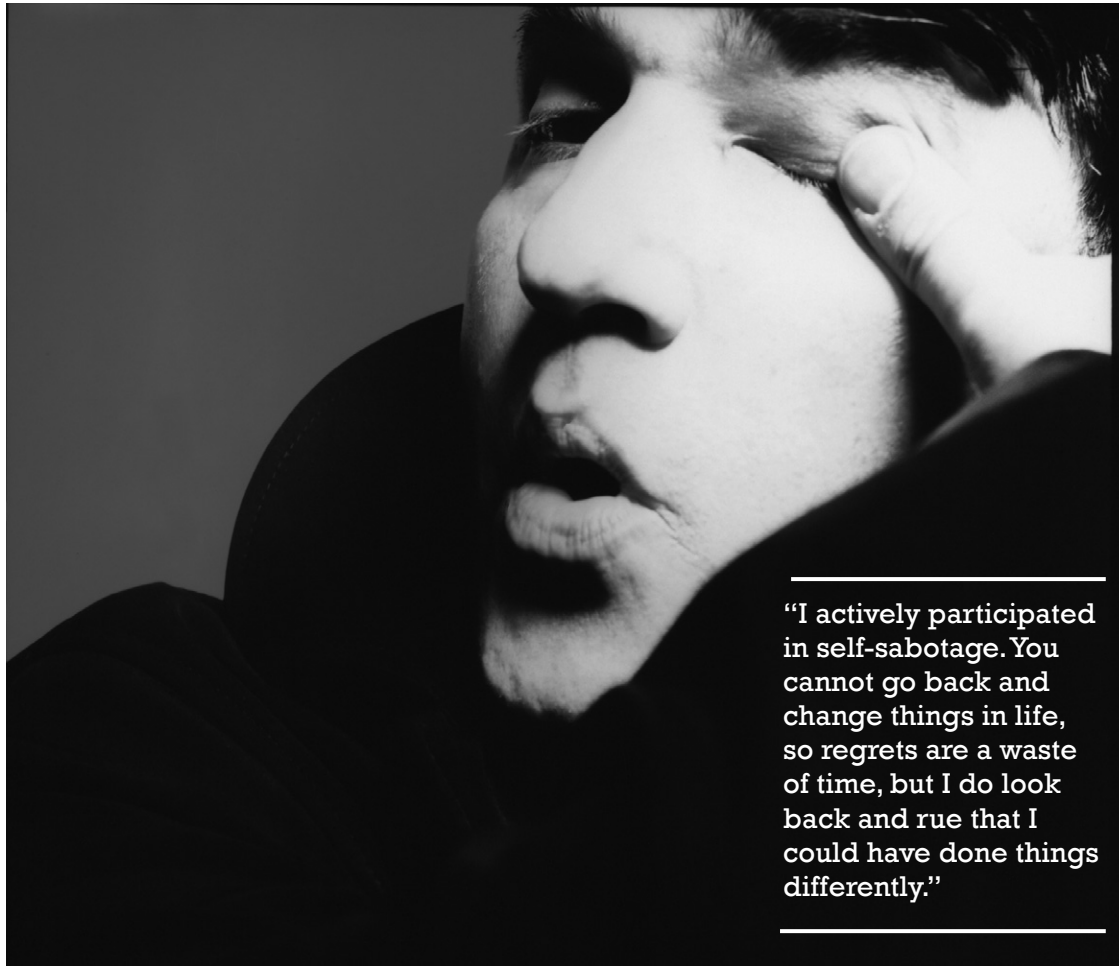
"All of them!" Dulli laughs. "I think my thoughts can be summed up in the Led Zeppelin song *Your Time Is Gonna Come*. I believe the first line of the song is 'Lying, cheating, hurting, that's all you ever do'."

This is something of a worry. Last time *Rip It Up* spoke to Dulli for the release of The Gutter Twins' debut album *Saturnalia* in 2008, the songwriter had said life was good and he had a girlfriend who loved him.

"That is not the case right now. That was a couple of years ago and life goes in cycles, but it's fine. I'm enjoying my life, I'm just definitely not in love, I can tell you that."

A sign that all is not peachy in Dulli's world comes with *Last Night In Town*'s concluding lines: 'I promise to be with you till the end, at least until you're dead'. Are we talking murderous intentions here? Dulli chuckles at the accusation.

"It's funny you'd mention that line. We started rehearsing for the live show and I'd not sung those words since I



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sang them in the studio, so it struck me that it was a hardcore line. I think it speaks of betrayal more than murder. I think people's allegiances sometimes have an expiration point and I was trying to spell that out for myself. Loyalty is a funny thing and when someone is disloyal - including myself - it's a voided contract and it's a disappointment that's sometimes taken to the grave with you. I think that love is a means to an end in some cases - certainly in a couple of cases I've experienced."

Big Star's Alex Chilton, an influential artist who both inspired Dulli and collaborated with him on The Afghan

Whigs' final album *1965*, died last year. When Dulli gives a heartfelt eulogy to his departed affiliate, his words throw light on his own creative impulses.

"Alex was fiercely independent and did what he wanted, although I actually felt that part of his desire got beat out of him a little bit. He was writing songs at such a high calibre that when he started to slum it later on I had to wonder if he was in self-sabotage mode. He wrote some great songs after *Big Star*, no doubt - some of my favourite songs that he ever did - but I think in a lot of ways he had a broken heart for a long time. I'm not pretending to be his psychiatrist or even his best

friend, but it's a personal observation of someone I was frankly in awe of based on the songs he wrote and the feelings he made me feel. I think at the end of his life he may have been the happiest he had been in a while - he was married and loved his wife. What more can you ask for than to be loved and love in return?"

Dulli's mention of Chilton's 'self-sabotage mode' sounds like an action the musician isn't a stranger to. Leaving a trail of record labels and broken belts behind him, there have been multiple occasions during his 20 years of recording when Dulli has picked at his stitches and revelled in the scars instead of letting

wounds heal.

"I actively participated in self-sabotage," Dulli muses. "I think I over-complicated my life in a lot of ways and in retrospect age has provided some wisdom. You cannot go back and change things in life, so regrets are a waste of time, but I do look back and rue that I could have done things differently."

Multiple indie bands who splintered in the '90s have used reunion tours to bring their history to a more triumphant closure. The criminally underrated but critically revered Afghan Whigs have been approached on multiple occasions, but Dulli remains resistant.

"I don't know who makes those sort of offers, but I do know my agent will occasionally email, text or call me if the money is looking good to him. I always have the same answer: I'm not interested in doing that as I did it already. I just don't want to do it anymore."

While oft portrayed as America's ultimate barfly poet, Dulli suggests he's not the sort to find inspiration in nightclubs at 4am, writing ideas on the backs of coasters as he's being turfed onto the street.

"You know I really don't write a lot of things down, to be honest with you. I kind of have a running dialogue in my head and once I get something going I know what I'm going to say. I'll freestyle it a little and then I'll begin to hone it. I write things down during the songwriting process, but only so I can see how to get from A to B."

As part owner of three bars in various cities of the US, Dulli rules the jukeboxes at each establishment with an iron fist. Don't expect any Black Eyed Peas or Ke\$ha on the playlist.

"I choose the jukebox music, but there's no Ke\$ha or Black Eyed Peas - shame on you! If I liked Ke\$ha or Black Eyed Peas I'd put them on there, but I don't. That said, I let a Katy Perry tune on, but she had good songs. Ke\$ha's songs are shit and Black Eyed Peas are just annoying, but *Teenage Dream* is a masterpiece, that song is phenomenal. I loved it - and never got sick of it either, even when it got beat into the ground."

Dynamite Steps is out now through Sub Pop/Inertia.

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