

# the press conference with RONAN KEATING

I first met Ronan Keating in January 1995 to do an 'At Home' in Dublin. He was 17 and a slip of a lad who had kicked in his shoe shop job to pursue a pop star dream. It all came spectacularly true as Boyzone figure-danced to seven No.1's and 15 million album sales — and Keating was the undoubted star. He went solo in 1999 and bucked the trend by succeeding with a string of hits including "When You Say Nothing At All" and "Life Is A Rollercoaster".

Keating's blessed career got its first bloody nose in 2003 when he decided his manager Louis Walsh had the 'Ex-Factor' and sacked him. But showbiz hath no fury than a pop svengali scorned and Walsh set about knifing his former protege in the back through the tabloids.

Few in pop could probably deserve it less than Keating, a devoted father of three and devout Catholic who never badmouths anyone.

The feud was exacerbated when Ronan's next album flopped. Walsh gloated, but Ronan stayed silent and bounced back with a No.1 'Greatest Hits'. After a long break, he is set to release a new single in April, followed by an album.

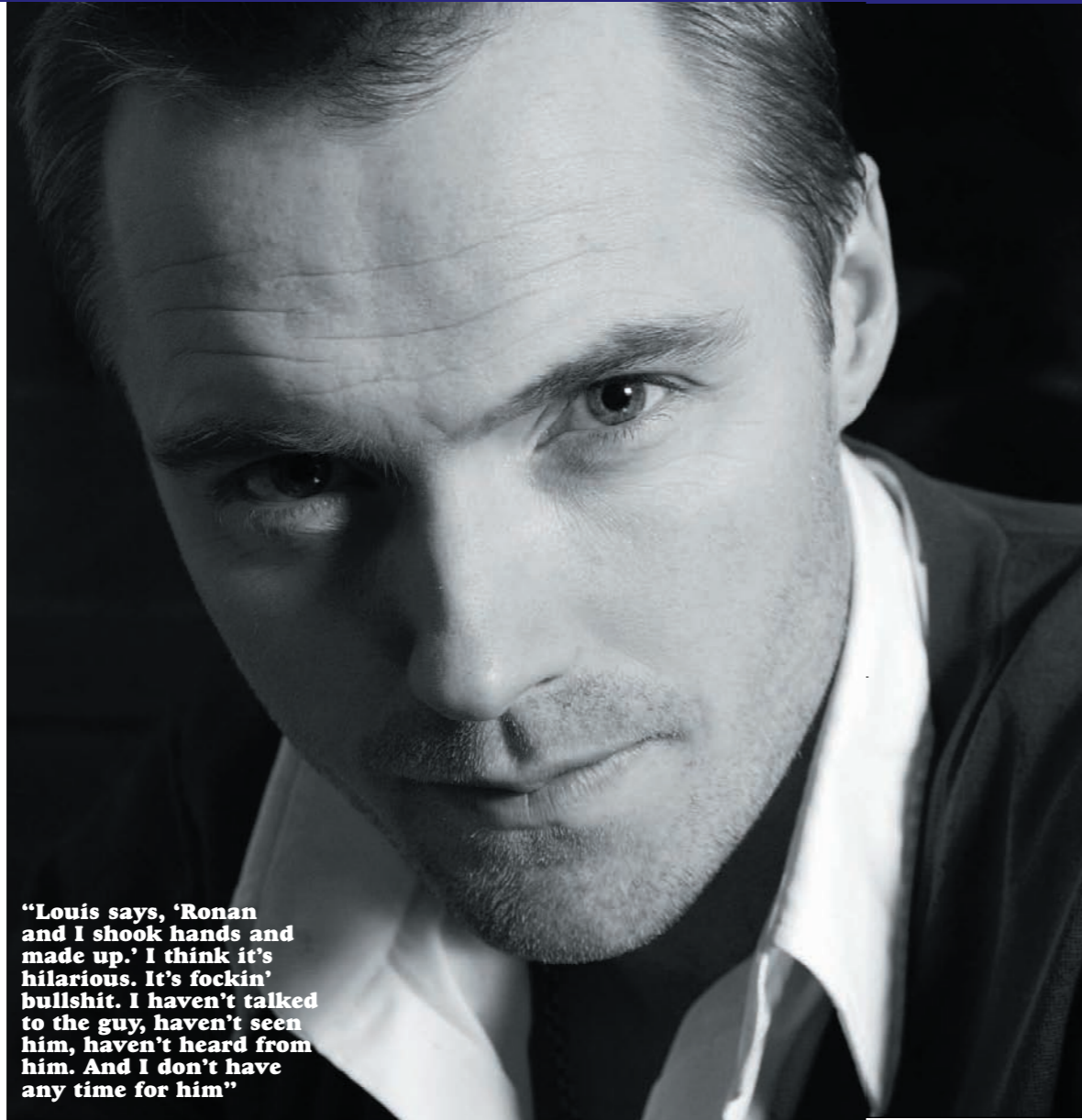
Keating may have a choir-boy image, but he is no pop puppet. He is mature beyond his years — he's still only 28 — and suffers no fools. But he wears his heart on his sleeve, likes a good drink and liberally seasons his distinctive Dublin tones with the "f\*ck" word.

We meet at a private members' club in Soho for his first interview in 14 months. It would be absurd to say he hasn't changed much since the day I first met him, but considering what he has experienced, Keating is admirably similar.

**Ronan, you've been away from the scene for a while. Before we get to the nitty-gritty of, erm, certain people, why don't you explain why this new album is so important after the performance of the last one?**

*10 Years of Hits* sold 3.5 million, which was fantastic, but *Tim It On* sold only 500,000 in the UK, which was not good. That was hard for me and was a wake-up call — big time. It made me realise you can't just write any album you want — not that I ever thought I could. I still think it was a great album, but we made a big mistake with the first single, which affected it badly.

The Hits was massive for me because I was back in people's heads and hearts again, and it allowed me to take a year out. If I had taken this amount of time off after *Tim It On* I would probably have disappeared, but I went away on a high. I realise how important this new album is and the pressure has built in the past few months, but I think we have got it right. Please God!



**"Louis says, 'Ronan and I shook hands and made up.' I think it's hilarious. It's f\*ckin' bullshit. I haven't talked to the guy, haven't seen him, haven't heard from him. And I don't have any time for him"**

It's taken a year to make, which is the longest I've taken on an album. I have a studio at home and went there whenever I felt like writing a song. It was inspirational to work like that and I have written about 75 per cent of the songs on the album. I know people would expect me to say this, but it's the best record I've ever made. The album is very rounded and I still enjoy listening to it, which is a good sign because usually I can't stand it by this stage!

**You seem a bit tense. I imagine there's a lot to think about and it must feel odd doing interviews after being locked away for so long.**

Yeah, I am wound up, but only because I am at that period where we're just about to go and I want to make sure we are in the right place. I'm a f\*ckin' worrier, man, and I get very stressed. The big worry is that the first single is the right one. It is everything because it shows people what the album is about. The only reason I am like this is the mistake we made before.

Portrait  
Phil Adams

I have not had to think about being interviewed, so getting back into that head space is weird. I am used to being asked about pushing up the fader or pressing record, or changing a nappy. It's been an amazing time because working at my home studio has meant I can still be a father while making a record. I can take the kids to school, pick them up, put them to bed and still get into the studio.

**OK, Louis Walsh. I realise you don't want to fuel the row, but if you're promoting a new record, every journalist is going to ask — so what's the situation?**

I'm not into condemning Louis. I don't need to stoop to slugging him off. That's not what I am about, or how I was raised to treat people. If that's what he wants to do, let him. I could do it, no problem. There are lots of things I could tell you, but why would I want to get into a battle with someone in the press? And if I say something, he would only come back

## RONAN'S NEWS SCHEDULE



### Newspapers:

I read the *Irish Times* just about every day. I pick one up from the newsagent when I drop the kids off at school. I also like the *Irish Independent*, and I get *The Observer* on Sundays. I keep well informed and I think it's important to educate yourself and know how the world is bearing up. I like flipping through the tabloids, but I don't buy them.



### Magazines:

I love cars and bikes magazines. I admit I am a total anorak when it comes to those. *Top Gear*, *Car*, *BMW Magazine*. I get them all. I also love gadgets, so *Stuff* magazine is great. The best gadget I've got at the moment is on my phone. It has a button on the side that connects you to a concierge service. They promise to do anything for you — book restaurants, flights, anything. It's f\*ckin' brilliant. One night I was pissed drunk with mates in New York and

with something else, so what's the point?

I'm grateful for what he did with Boyzone. Louis helped us out in the beginning, but after that we kind of made our own success. There are two sides to him. In one sense, he is very controlling and wants to have everything, but then he doesn't want to manage you. So when you try and do something else he gets upset and says, "But I'm your manager, I should be doing that." I said to him, "Here, please look after these things," then six months later nothing would have been done. I said, "You know, Louis, you're not managing me, this is not working."

At one point, I was on a world tour and we opened in Sydney, and he didn't even know where I was. He was my manager, but he would only get involved when the album was being made. I had to sack him because he wouldn't manage me. It's OK for him, he can manage 10, 20 different bands, but I've got one shot at this, so I have no time to waste if important things aren't being done. Louis would have been a very good manager for me if he'd brought in other people to do jobs for him, but he wouldn't delegate.

**It can't have been easy reading the stuff in the press. He slaughtered you, called you "talentless", and much of it was written by journalists you know really well.**

Oh yeah, he hurt me alright. Absolutely — and he knows it. I'm OK about it now, but I have no respect for him because he has none for me. He tried to absolutely ruin my career because he was jealous. I couldn't believe what he put in the papers. Why do that to someone? We were very close, really good friends. We did Boyzone, we put Westlife together, but it was more than just working together, we were friends. We would hang out together, talk about music. I liked his company and I think he liked mine. But the stuff he came out with in the press was just outrageous, man. Why people printed the stuff, I don't understand. Those people know me, they pretended to be my friends, but they wrote those things knowing they weren't true. It actually made Louis look stupid because he'd spent eight years saying the opposite — that I was good — so it was just silly and unprofessional. I don't understand what's in his head.

Now he's trying to make up with me because he wants Boyzone to get back together. He says in the papers, "Oh, Ronan and I shook hands and made up." I think it's hilarious and I'm telling you, man, it's f\*ckin' bullshit. I haven't talked to the guy, haven't seen him, haven't heard from him. And I don't have any time for him, we are a million miles from each other.

Louis really hurt me, but it's done now and I have too many good things in my life to bother worrying about all that.

we rang to get some chips. I had a real laugh with the guy and he found a place for us — I think we ended up having kebabs.

I don't subscribe to any magazines because I am not home enough. I once subscribed to *Billboard* and I got back from tour and there was a pile of them still in their plastic wrapping and I thought, I'm not f\*ckin' doing that again.

### Television:

I have Sky News on in the background most of the time without brainwashing the kids. I like the 6pm or 9pm news in Ireland, and if I am away I watch BBC World, Sky or CNN. My favourite show recently has been *24*, and my wife and I loved *Lost*.

### Web:

I don't listen to the radio much because I have my iPod with me everywhere. I also have a BlackBerry, which I use all the time. I am really into my Macs, but the only website I use a lot is iTunes. I'm not one for surfing to find all kinds of crap I don't need, but I will book a weekend away on the net if it means it's a bit cheaper. The concierge service is great, but they book everything at the most expensive rates.

**Ok, let's get off that one. On a lighter note, can you give me an example of the dafter press you've had lately and maybe some of the stuff you regret over the years?**

I read recently that I've bought an island off the coast of Ireland. Why would I buy one *there* — it's too f\*ckin' cold! The Caribbean maybe. To be honest, I've been really lucky with the press and even the paparazzi leave me alone, which I appreciate. I said some stupid things about being a virgin when I was 16, which was more embarrassing than difficult. People looked at me like I was a f\*ckin' leper.

The one thing I regret was doing pictures for *OK!* magazine when my son was born. I chose something for him and it was wrong, I let him down. As a parent, it's your duty to protect your children until they can decide for themselves. I showed his face, took his privacy. He was a baby and looks totally different now, but still, it's the principle.

### So what made you do it?

It was really good f\*ckin' money! It was something like 200 grand — sterling — but I wouldn't do anything with my children again until they can decide for themselves. Not for any money.

**And what about your teeth. I read that you got them all capped to have a better chance of cracking America. Is that so?**

No way! I got my teeth done because they were f\*cked. I didn't get them done for anyone else but for me and my wife. You know, you make a few bob and you want your teeth fixed. Everyone wants good teeth. I felt self-conscious of these two (*shows me two perfectly aligned eye teeth*) because they were wonky. They got shaved down and capped. All for €1,200!

**Your mother, Marie, died from breast cancer in 1998 and you started a charity in her memory. What is currently happening with that?**

It is going from strength to strength and we now have three mobile units in Ireland that go round making people more aware of cancer. We're about to form a partnership with Cancer Research UK, which is brilliant. People like myself have a duty to give something back because we've been given so much more. I'm very proud of what we have achieved with the charity.

**Despite all the clean-cut image, you're known to like a good party. How is the boozing?**

Well, I don't drink Jack Daniel's as much these days because my liver hurts. Honestly, man, I was getting twinges the next day. And the Diet Coke was making me f\*ckin' shake. I could drink half a bottle of Jack a night, no bother. I mix it with ginger ale now, but I drink red wine more than anything, which apparently



by Rob McGibbon



is better for you. I might have two Jack's, then wine, then a few more Jack's at the end of the night. But I tell ya, I've got a shite memory lately!

**What do you think of your wholesome media image? You get some stick from certain corners of the press.**

Everybody thinks that I am this clean-cut, nicest-guy-in-pop character. That's fine, but I didn't get into this to be in the press, I got into it for music. I was in a boy band, so there is a certain stigma, but I am cool with that. People think you're different because you're not throwing TVs out of windows or taking drugs. Because I got married young, I'm different. Well, I don't give a shite. I want to have a family and make records, so that's what I do.

Certain magazines won't allow me in because they're "cool", but I'm not bothered. I don't read those magazines and the people who listen to my music don't buy them either. There are critics who will always have a go, but it's easy to slag off pop music. As for the papers, I don't have a problem with any of them. I have always shown them respect and they show it back, and the publicity I get is generally great, but I tend not to read all of it. Early on, Bono said to me, "Don't read all your press or you might end up believing the hype."

**With the launch of a new album, there are countless interviews ahead. How do you feel about that prospect?**

I am up for it. The main thing I am looking forward to is getting back playing with the band and performing, but I know that publicity is all part of it and I don't have a problem with interviews. The only thing I am not a fan of is having my picture taken. I don't like posing and photographers drive me crazy because they always take the same shot 10,000 times.

But I know I'm a lucky f\*cker to do what I do and have what I have, so I wouldn't change a thing. I have a really good relationship with the press. They don't hassle me and I don't hassle them by telling them bullshit and playing games, or asking for favours. If you do that, you will get burnt eventually. *rob.mcgibbon@virgin.net*

## Ronan Keating's FANTASY FLYERS

**What would be the Fantasy Headline of the story you would most like to read?**

"Finally Hunger Is Eradicated From The World". I am a United Nations Ambassador for Food and Agriculture, so I have seen how serious the situation is for some people.

**What would be the Fantasy Headline involving yourself?**

That's really f\*ckin' tough because I have so much already, who am I to wish for more? But how about "Keating Hits No.1 In America". That would be nice, thanks very much.

**What would be the headline you most dread?**

"Oh Fock — He's Pressed The Button!"

**Who would you most like to interview and what question would you ask?**

Nelson Mandela. I have met Nelson, but it was just to say Hello, shake his hand and do a photo. That was amazing enough, but I would love to talk to him properly and really get inside his head and hear what he thinks about certain things.

**What question would you never answer?**

I don't have a problem doing interviews and I'll answer anything you want — but I might not give the answer you were hoping for.

**What would you like to be your obituary headline?**

He had love, life and happiness. That will do for me.