

## the press conference with WESTLIFE

In boy band law, it is written that after three years at the top of the charts all members will kindly leave the building. Please fold up the bar stools, loosen the pouts and cover up the glistening six packs that will have sadly spread into bloated party kegs. One will go into rehab, another will attempt an excruciating solo career and the remainder will creep back to their housing estates. Finally they will re-emerge years later with armfuls of writs for their former manager who had secretly hoovered all the royalties up his nose. Somewhere along the way, Westlife mislaid the script, but they didn't lose the plot. Seven years in, they are still crooning away in black and white slow-mo on MTV and swooning to screaming hordes on sell-out arena tours.

The stats so far are 12 number-one singles and six hit albums with sales of 34m. They have showrooms of cars, several homes each and multiple bank accounts heaving with cash. But it hasn't been unsmudged lipgloss all the way. Last year the gobby one, Bryan McFadden, reckoned he could do it on his own. He was last seen singing to some kangaroos in Australia. Then two months ago, Mark Feehily announced he is gay. Two of the others, Shane Filan and Nicky Byrne, are happily married (Nicky to Irish PM Bertie Ahern's daughter, Georgina) and Kian Egan, is in a relationship with a former Hollyoaks actress. For those of you who don't have posters of the boys on the wall, is all that clear?

Westlife are all Irish and 25, although Nicky laments with all the seriousness of a man past his youth that he is 27. Now they are back with a new single and album. The broadsheet music critics have given up kicking them and the tabloids have despaired of digging up some dirt. Are Westlife the Teflon boys of pop?

**Lads, the script says you should be on your way by now. What's going on?**

K: People thought we would be long gone by now, but as long as fans still want us around, we will be here.

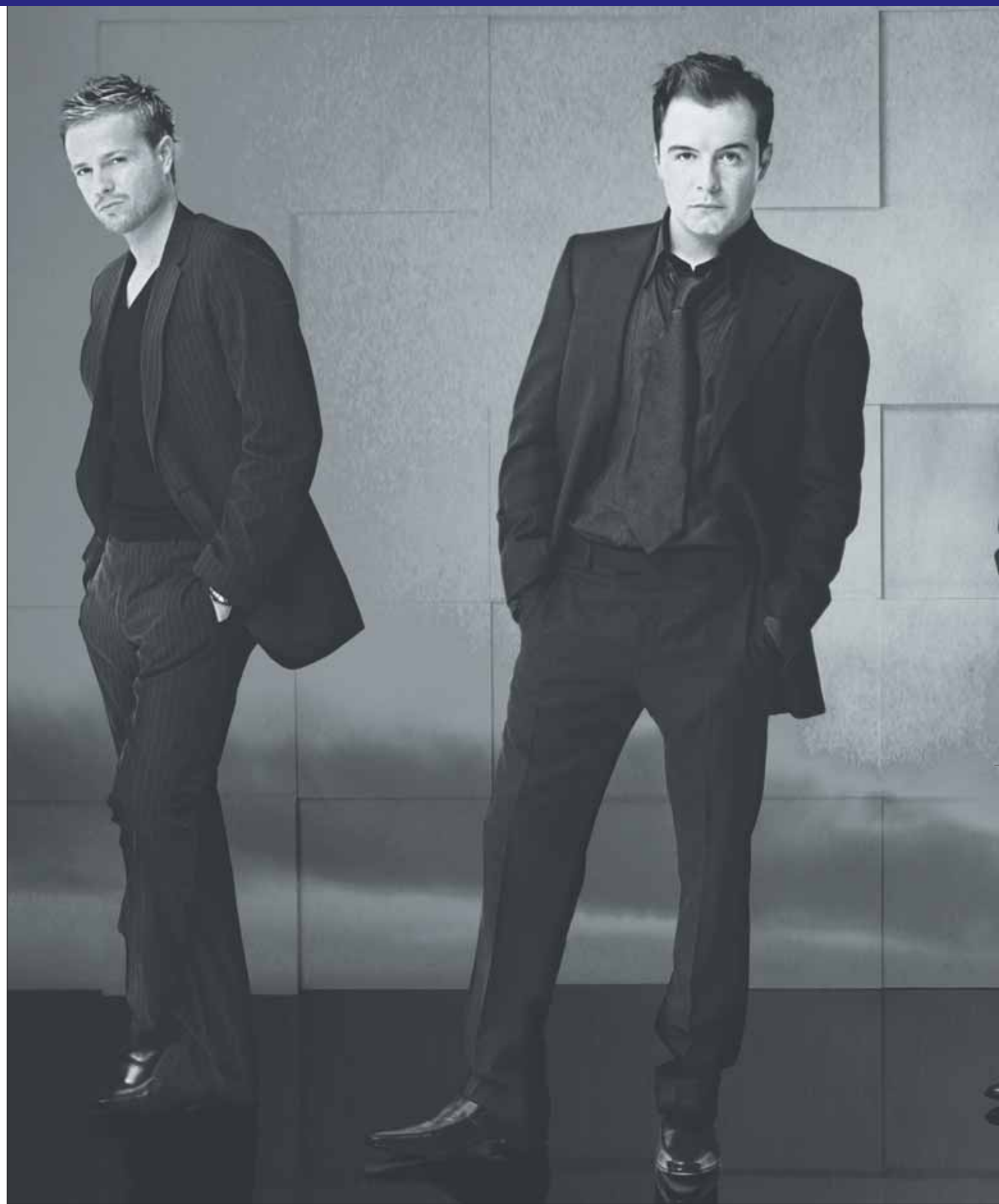
S: At the beginning, we thought we would have an amazing few years and then it would all be over, but it's kept going.

N: There has never been a set plan, except to keep making records and keep going as long as they are selling. And they are, so we are still here.

M: We always read in the papers that we make bubblegum pop and that it is rubbish, but we don't make music for the media, we make it for the fans and they like it a lot, and that's all that matters to us.

**When is the big split likely to happen?**

N: We have read the headline "Westlife To Split Up" so many times now that we just laugh when we see it.



If it happens, then we will be straight out with it, so no journalist need bother writing that story for a while. Seriously, we'll just tell everyone and do some amazing farewell concert and be gone.

S: Bono told us that if you have two really bad albums that do not sell, then that's the time to go. One is OK, you can get away with that, but if you have two, then you have to admit it's over.

M: We have not had a disastrous one yet and we will keep going until there are two duds. Then we will have to say, "Thank you very much, goodbye."

**When Bryan left, just about everyone thought that was the end. Surely you guys did as well?**

N: To be honest, we really had our concerns about how it would work out as a four piece, but we kept it all inside and did not let the public know. It was hard to read all the stuff that said Shane and Mark would go solo, Kian was going into management and that I was going to be a politician.

S: Bryan going was a shock even though we knew he had not been happy for a while. None of us knew his marriage was on the rocks. As soon as he was

gone, we had to pull together as a team and get down to work. When we did our first show as a four piece, it was fantastic. We really nailed it and the fans loved it. It was only then that we knew for sure that it was going to be OK.

M: Some of the papers basically said it was all over, but if anything we are a better band as a four piece. We are closer and there are no secrets, like if someone is wanting to leave or to go solo.

K: As far as the media were concerned, Westlife was finished after the last album, but we do not make music for the media, or the newspapers. We think this new album is the best we have done.

**And what news of Bryan?**

M: We are still really good friends with him and were speaking to him the other day. He has had a really tough time and has been totally hammered by the press.

The best thing for him to do is to go away for a long time and let everything calm down. Maybe then he can still do something good with his career. We honestly wish him all the best.

Portrait  
Hugo Dixon  
Idols