



“GET THE F\*CK  
OFF THE STAGE  
AND GO HOME  
OR I WILL  
TEAR YOU TO  
SHREDS”

Not our words, Keith Flint's. And now the pierced and punk-plumed face of arguably the Greatest Dance Act Of All Time is back, and he wants to start a fire in your soul...

**T**here's a no-smoking sign on the wall of the London studio where we meet Keith Flint. Still, The Prodigy's pierced and punk-plumed wildman is rolling a fag. He crams a wad of Golden Virginia into a crumpled Rizla, licks it, lights it and takes a long, merciful drag.

"I fucking hate this nanny state we live in right now," he exhales, filling the room with smoke. "It's like being back at school. I cannot be told what to do. As soon as I'm told not to, I will. It's the death of life, the nanny state. And it kills everything. It will turn us all into zombies."

We are talking about the controlling influences of the music industry. It was only while making of The Prodigy's new album, *The Day Is My Enemy*, that he says he had a staffing cull to kill the 'maggots' feeding off the band.

"When you've got people telling you to do this and that, you can feel like meat," he blasts. "So I now only directly deal with [bandmates] Liam or Maxim. I've never had a personal manager; I've always looked after myself. That's why I dress myself, that's why I speak for myself, and that's

## "I HAVE GROWN UP KNOWING NOBODY IS GOING TO LOOK AFTER ME, SO IF I DON'T, WHO IS?"

why I remain myself. I'm quite willing to fuck things up for myself but I'm not going to have some cunt do it for me. Not for something that's so precious. Would you let someone come into your family and tell you how it should be run? I never have, and right now, I'm using that history to be even more of a cunt."

A conversation with Keith is not unlike one of his gigs. It is unpredictable, visceral, and raw. It can be angry at times, scary at others, but entrancing throughout. But he is not the four-letter lady-part he just singled out. Not today, anyway. In fact, he is rather charming and funny. Eloquent, too. And he laughs a lot.

"I am kind of a court jester meets asylum escapee," he says. "I sometimes describe myself as like a hallway in a house: you think you're inside, but there's another door to the real me. I'll sit and wait like a predator and then I will cut you down. I will fucking cut you down to the ground."

He seems to be looking us dead in the eye, though all we can see is our own reflection staring sheepishly back at us through his big, purple sunglasses.

**K**eith Flint has come to this interview dressed as Keith Flint. Apart from the shades, he's wearing a pork-pie hat and a blue-and-white striped prison uniform shirt. A bolt bores

through his upper ear and tattoos cover his arms and chest. He bursts with energy and ideas, pogoing between topics as they come into his head, and he swears like a trucker in a jackknife. He'll often call someone, or himself, a cunt, apologise, then use the word again. Can one man really exude this much passion all the time? What happens when the music stops and the lights go up? Who is Keith Flint, really?

Born on 17 September 1969, Keith was raised in Braintree, Essex. He admits his wasn't a particularly happy childhood and his parents split when he was young. "I hated being at home so much that I'd go in for dinner – which was statutory – and if it wasn't ready for three minutes, I'd go out again and come back three minutes later."

At the age of 15, Keith was thrown out of school. "I was quite disruptive and out there," he remembers. "Then I found myself

in a load of remedial classes being told how to use a ruler. But when they tested my IQ, they found out I was quite intelligent. Trouble is, I'm definitely on the spectrum somewhere – there's a dysfunctional side. That probably sounds like I'm trying to back up mad Keith – but if you want me to be honest with you, that's as honest as it gets."

Keith undertook various jobs as a butcher, a roofer and an investigative driller. But a thirst for adventure had infected his soul. So, in the summer of 1988, he left Essex to roam the Middle East and Africa.

"When I got back, someone was telling me about the acid-house rave scene and I thought, 'Fucking hell, you're talking about something with as much passion as I would be talking about hitchhiking to Israel.' I wanted a piece of that."

The spring of 1989 led him to an outdoor rave in Essex where little-known dance DJ Liam Howlett was playing. "I loved his music and boom, I was in," says Keith. "I was never the brains behind the band – that was always Liam. But together we were a complete package. It was the outlet I was looking for."



Music became Keith's medicine. "As a kid, I was always fighting to be who I was," he says. "Then suddenly, I no longer had to fight. I just was."

The early '90s saw The Prodigy burst from the chest of the underground rave scene like strobe-lit aliens on ecstasy. Melding breakbeat, jungle and hardcore into a bludgeoning wall of sound, their second album, *Music For The Jilted Generation*, spawned a jagged new genre of pop. Then, in 1997, *Fat Of The Land* reached No 1 in the UK and US and they've topped the British album charts with every record since. They've got two Brits, three MTV VMAs, two Kerrang! Awards and five MTV Europe Music Awards. They've been nominated for two Grammys and today, they've sold more than 25 million records worldwide. Not that Keith cares.

"We never gave a fuck about making money or what people thought," Keith says. "All we ever wanted was to play our music."

**B**andmates and flunkies have come and gone, but controversy has been a lifelong friend to The Prodigy. Over the years, they have been accused of everything from inciting arson (*Firestarter*) to condoning domestic violence (*Smack My Bitch Up*), leaving middle-England's papers and parents dry-heaving on the taste of their own outrage.

"I went out with a girl who was a bit lah-di-dah," Keith recalls. "She was cool and grounded but her mum one day opened the *Guardian* and there was a picture of me with green hair, draped over a monitor, dribbling – the full fucking Monty Flinty. The headline was: 'What would you do if your daughter brought this home?' Her parents fucking hated me with a passion."

But as their currency in music grew, so too did their pay cheques – and their appetite for drug-addled abandon, though Keith says he rarely got high on stage.

"I did half a pill at Labyrinth (legendary East London venue) at our first proper gig and I thought my head was going to drop off. I realised I didn't need a false rush when on stage – it was already there."

Then, in the early 2000s, Liam's creative flow – that had buoyed the band for so long – ran dry for the first time in 20 years with a bout of writer's block. No new material meant no gigs with which to sponge up Keith's rampant energy.

"Yeah, it was a dark period," he says. "I was drinking and taking too many drugs. The problem is, you've got shitloads of cash and shitloads of time and all you're doing is looking for a buzz. I did fuck all really, apart from being a jerk." »

# "I AM KIND OF A COURT JESTER MEETS ASYLUM ESCAPEE"

**B**y the time Liam finally found his mojo, Keith had unravelled. "I got to the point where I had to stop. I didn't want to be a jabbering wreck." But coastal walks and solitary Saturday nights in never much suited Keith. "I was heading for complete vanilla-ism," he says. "Being sober, my obsession became being fit and focused, but I like to leave the planet now and again. I decided to have the odd joint or a few beers to keep a bit of psychedelia in my life."

And here we are now, sitting with Keith in this London studio, five albums and 26 years since he and Liam first met in that muddy Essex field – two lost boys drawn together by a shared love of hardcore and a burning problem with authority.

"I think Liam is the only person I've ever loved," says Keith, with genuine affection. "He and Maxim have actually taken time to get to know who I am. It's probably to do with not having a good family background. The band became my family."

We feel for a moment as if we're breaking through. But when we joke that we've made it inside the hallway of Keith's mind and can see he's left another door ajar, he flashes a faux glare. "Tread carefully or I will cut you to shreds," he bites, turning out that football-

hooligan snarl he employs on *Firestarter*. He's still smiling... but you never quite seem to know with Keith. We try a different tack. Something safe. Keith's other great obsession is motorcycle racing. He owns a race team and, at weekends, can often be found with wife Mayumi at a motorbike grand prix somewhere in Europe.

"It's about challenging your bravery and your balls," he says. It is a metaphor for life: If you don't go into a bend without that sharp intake of breath then you ain't going fast enough. The sooner you become aware that you're mortal, the sooner you start living."

Keith lives in his rural Essex mansion with Mayumi – a Japanese DJ who plays by the name Super Megabitch – and their nine dogs. He also owns a pub called the Leather Bottle in Pleshey, near his home. "We've got an open fire, and I've got about 60 quid in a pint pot on the mantelpiece because every time I light it, the *Firestarter* jokes come out, and boom, I'm like, that's very funny, you owe me a pound. The money goes in and then off to charity."

**A**s Keith approaches his 46th birthday, it's clear he's lost none of his edge. But does he ever feel trapped by his hell-raising

reputation? Does he tire of being the *Firestarter*? "When I go away, I'm always the *Firestarter*," he reflects. "I carry that everywhere I go. Nobody sees a musician... Oh, sorry, bigging myself up there. They just see me. [But] I am determined not to let The Prodigy overrun every aspect of my life so I can still live it."

We are nearing the end of our time together. While we've seen fleeting glimpses inside Keith's mind, we've only peeked into some of those back rooms that lurk behind the hallway. Some of them, we're not sure we even want to enter.

Suddenly, he tells us a story. "My dad," he says. "He was a violent cunt. I had this mohawk as a kid and I remember he once dragged me up the hairdressers. But because there was only a strip of hair to cut, I ended up with a little quiff at the front and I looked like Tintin. The humiliation of going back to school with that was mental cruelty."

"[Years later] I saw Liam and the way that he put in with his father and I thought that maybe I hadn't made enough effort. I thought perhaps the downside of my childhood was a product of who I was." So, in a bid to 'see what a family looked like', Keith reached out to his father one last

time. "I opened that door and he let me down again," says Keith. "So I rung him and said, 'You will never see me again. You will never speak to me again. And if I see you, I will beat you.' From that moment on, I was a man and I was free."

It would be easy to attribute his rage to a troubled childhood. And perhaps he *has* spent his life yelling back at some echo from his past. But now, free seems the word that best describes Keith Flint. He seems, more than most, to take life by the testicles and genuinely doesn't care what people think of him.

"I'm not saving up for anything," he says. "I'm cashing it all now. I've always had this thing inside me that, when I'm done, I'll kill myself. I swear to God that's not suicidal – it's definitely a positive thing. The moment I start shitting the bed is when you'll see me on the front of a bus."

Then he smiles, rather sweetly, and adds, "I think I'm very generous of spirit with the people I love, but I can also be a very selfish person too. I've grown up knowing nobody is going to look after me, so if I don't, who is? I'm not frightened of who I am; I just want to look back and know that I've lived what I consider a fulfilled life. That's all. Happy days." **FHM**

WORDS: MATT BLAKE. PICTURES: MIKE VAN CLEVEN AND INSTAGRAM.COM/KEITHOFFICIAL

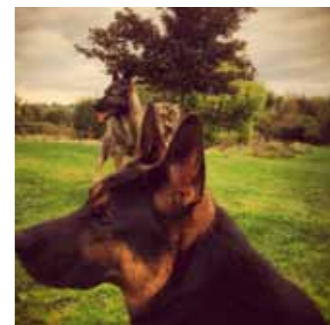


## KEITH'S LIFE ON INSTAGRAM

Χοχοχοχο χοχοχο χοχοχο χοχοχο  
χοχοχοχο ο χοχοχοχοχο οχοχοχοχο  
χοχοχοχοχο



"When I took over the pub, I found this piece of rotting meat behind the fridge and it sums up how I felt by the time we finished the new album: rotten inside. There were too many maggots trying to get their piece of The Prodigy."



"That's Cyrus and Bonnie. You can trust a dog more than you can trust a person because you know what they're about. When they fuck up, you don't have to cuss and lift rolled-up newspapers. Respect them in a disappointed way – 'Ah, fuck's sake, you've just eaten my phone,' and they're like, 'Yeah fucking hell, sorry about that.'"



"Aside from music, my other great obsession is motorcycle racing. I own a race team, and this is James Rispoli, one of the riders in Team Traction Control. Racing's like life: if you don't go into a bend without that sharp intake of breath like you're going over a roller coaster, you ain't going fast enough."



"The Monster girls are the bollocks. They're down, intelligent, good fun and good partiers. No, my wife doesn't mind – I don't have to be around girls with a view to shag them. I enjoy their company and they enjoy mine."



"That's me and Liam. We are true brothers. We argue like brothers but he is about the only person in my life who has taken time to understand who I am and accept who I am. He doesn't always like it, but that love will never die."

Catch The Prodigy on their European tour between 10 April and 16 May, or at Isle of White Festival and T in the Park. Visit [theprodigy.co.uk](http://theprodigy.co.uk)